

My Village



By E. Boyd Smith

With Illustrations
by the Author.



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MY VILLAGE

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E. BOYD SMITH
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS,
NEW YORK — 1896

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University Press:
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.



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MY VILLAGE

My Village



VALOMBRE

VALOMBRE is a picturesque little village of about fifteen hundred souls, situated some thirty miles to the north of Paris. Though very old (in existence in A. D. 885, when the Norsemen came down the Oise to attack Paris), its history is very vague.

Every war directed against the capital brought desolation and destruction to the villagers. Legend claims that Joan of Arc passed through on her way to Orleans. Here Henry IV., while busily carrying on his fighting, managed to find time to make love to the châtelaine of L'Isle Adam.

But to-day, the traces of the last war nearly forgotten, life is more prosaic, and doubtless

happier. Yet the life of the village, though small and unimportant, still comprises in its own way all the complications of life in general.

Here the petty ambitions and their workings are simply feebler specimens of those which move mighty Paris and the great world. The troubles and misfortunes of general life are nearly all more or less represented. The pain and joy, success and failure, though ever so humble, are still as important here as are greater ones in greater places. Valombre is an epitome of the world and its life. And here humanity can be studied, and conclusions reached which can be applied to any other village or city. Its characteristics, though its own, are still based on the common big lines of average life, men and women at bottom being much the same the world over, once one gets to know them well. Outer appearances are different; but the base rarely changes. Given the same conditions and circumstances, knowing a few, one can count with reasonable accuracy on how the others will act.

Here artists struggle with all their might for fame; while others, more practical, are aiming after wealth. The disinterested and the mercenary battle on together. The peasant, terribly matter-of-fact, labors from sunrise to sunset, working the earth he loves for the money it brings him, ever saving and economizing. As he gains, he hoards his wealth to buy more earth and (a universal ambition) to pose before his neighbors, — much as do the business men in great cities.

Sickness, trouble, and death strike here as elsewhere. Nature cries out in pain, as in more highly civilized centres. Honesty and dishonesty elbow each other daily. Craftiness outdoes itself in its overreaching. Vice even raises its head. Crime, though feebly represented, has still its place. Faith and scepticism agree to disagree. Love and jealousy are not forgotten. Idleness and thrift dwell in the same house: and so on, indefinitely, the old, old story of life with all its good and bad, its lights and shadows.

Yes, the world is all alike; by my village I know the rest. Be it greater or smaller, it

is ever the same, only a question of scale ; here big, there small. The peasant, here laboriously striving, year in and year out, each day painfully resembling the last, acquires a philosophy whose lines are strikingly like that obtained by a great thinker and observer of life. He "takes things as they come." Changing the world is a great task ; and each gives it up, and "drifts " intelligently.



MY NEIGHBORS

CARVOL

CARVOL, my neighbor, a heavily built and clumsy peasant become mason, is addicted to strong drink, and at regular intervals shows up in a painfully inebriated condition, to the intense disgust of his wife, who mercilessly belabors him with a venomous tongue. After each drunk he is sick, and has to leave his

work for a day, while she makes it interesting for him.

Though the frequency of his celebrations merits the penalty it receives, since he often recklessly swallows, literally, half his month's pay, on which his wife has been counting, she, like most people of her class, uses so little judgment in administering the doses that he is driven to desperation. Formerly he would fly from the wrath to come; but now he fights back, sullenly and with accumulating viciousness; and I hear them at it at all hours.

I can sympathize with neither, as, though he is fast becoming a besotted brute, she is also degenerating into a termagant. Sooner or later, I fear that their quarrels will end in something serious; in desperation, crazed by drink and her tongue, he may strike too hard.

ROSALIE

Madame Carvol, or Rosalie, as she is better known, is a strong, well-preserved woman of forty-five, or thereabouts, generally very pleasant, affable, and obliging, but a terrible *bavarde* (gossip), capable of

leaving the most important work to talk scandal and trouble with any one who will listen, — man, woman, or child. At all times I hear her at it ; the tireless tongue hard at work. Yet, in spite of this weakness, she is still a good, kind soul ; and did I not, against my desires, hear her share of the daily and nightly quarrels with her husband, I should call her a thoroughly good-natured creature.

For the past five years she has been the telegraph-boy, so to speak, delivering the despatches. A wire from the post-office, also telegraph-headquarters, to her house rings her up when needed. For her services she receives twenty-five cents a day, throughout the year. The village has furnished her with a tri-cycle, as her district covers some eight miles.

During the summer, when the *bourgeois* are here, she is kept fairly busy ; but the winter leaves her quite free. On the delivery of each despatch she usually receives a “tip” of a few cents, one of the customs of this much “tipped” country ; so that, all in all, her appointment is considered a fairly good one. But she cannot or will not see it

in this light, and continually complains of the work she has to do; insisting that those who receive the despatches live in ease, while she has all the running,—a complaint so common that, whether there is any justice in it or not, one becomes heartily tired of hearing it from one end of the world to the other.

FIFIE

Her daughter Fifie is a big coarse girl of nineteen, a magnificent worker, with, as the peasants say, not a lazy bone in her body, good-natured and happy as the day is long, the life of the quarter. The pleasure of living is a real thing with Fifie. Just at present she is madly in love, and getting her money's worth out of the sensation.

Strange to say, and much to my amusement, to my surprise she chose me as her confidant, before her mother knew of the existence of the lover, and at every favorable opportunity gave me glowing accounts of his charms, ability, etc. But, at last, seeing that I enjoyed her enthusiasm too heartily, she lost faith in me, and, in des-

peration, finally induced the young man to present himself at her house.

KAISER

Fife's brother, just exempted from military service on account of a crippled thumb, disabled in a poaching expedition, is generally known as Kaiser. Being born while the Prussians were garrisoned in the village during the war of 1870-71, a local wag suggested in jest the idea of giving him this name; and, though the unfortunate boy was christened Eugène, Kaiser sticks to him and probably will through life. No doubt he resents it as a patriot, but his resentment avails him little.

Kaiser, recently developing an inclination to follow in his father's footsteps, and inadvertently appearing at the house in an elevated condition, his mother, in a rage, ordered him out and away. So for the moment he is flying free. But I have no doubt he will before long put in an appearance, after the style of the prodigal son, and with probably as easy results, Rosalie being, I

think, too good-hearted to long bear resentment against her son.

This sketch sums up the present standing of the Carvol family, though perhaps I should have included the dog, Misery, who walks on his hind legs; and the cat, who gives her lovers rendezvous in my yard at unearthly hours, disturbing the peace of my slumbers with painful frequency, though in the daytime "meowing" at me in a most innocent manner, as though nothing had happened.



CÉLESTINE AND DÉsirÉ

Below me, just across the street, Célestine and Désiré have lived for the last fifty years,

a sturdy pair of old-time peasants, still vigorous, though gnarled and knotted, and as brown as the earth they till. Every day sees them both at work in the fields, though now each can count seventy-odd years of life, and nearly as many of work.



A great grief came to them some twenty years ago ; their daughter, just married, suddenly took sick and died, and that day remains to Célestine as but yesterday. For now, in alluding to anything or any time, she invariably connects it in some way with her daughter. When speaking of the Exposition of 1878, she adds, “ ’T was just two years after my poor Julie was married ; ” again,

referring to some person, "She and my Julie were of the same age," etc. The event and date are indelibly engraved in the old woman's memory.



Célestine is garrulous, and, like Rosalie, loves a gossip ; when they meet hours fly by like minutes.

As I passed to-night I heard the old woman busily talking to the butcher's boy ; poor old soul, she must talk to some one, though only

a boy. She was sermoning this particular lad regarding the folly of idleness and the advantages of work, he stolidly listening, occasionally responding with "For sure, for sure," the extent of his powers of eloquence, now quite crushed by her voluble onslaught.

After the boy had left, I still heard her, this time calling after her cat, "Come in, it's time to go to bed;" but the cat sat quietly in the road, perfectly indifferent, declining to "come," and apparently considering, like servant-girls, this as his night out.

ACHILLE

Célestine's son, the blacksmith of Bléville, a neighboring village, occasionally comes over to see the old folks. Achille is a character, a village wiseacre. The old mother is very proud of him and his "science," as she calls it, meaning his general knowledge. He is filled to the eyes with theories and schemes, new ideas of progress, — ideas which he ponderously and verbosely lays down to the overpowered old woman. "Ah, yes," she says, "my Achille has a great head."

Achille poses as a sceptic, making fun of Célestine's old-fashioned notions. She occasionally retorts, and quite often gets the



better of him by her hard "horse sense," tritely disabling his flowery endeavors of oratory and argument. True, he never sees this, and so feels none the worse.

He had served in the war during the siege of Paris, and tells wonderful stories of that tragic epoch; but so prone is he to high coloring in his narratives, that facts and fancy become jumbled together; poor plain truth has a hard time of it, and

the listener loses faith.

Rheumatism quite often quiets him; then Célestine bitterly shakes her fist at Paris. "Ah, that Paris, the cause of all his

trouble ; he did not know what rheumatism was till that war came," quite overlooking the fact that Achille was a young man at that time, twenty-five years ago, and has since had ample time to acquire rheumatism without the help of war and siege. But the peasant instinctively blames all his troubles on Paris, and grows bitter as that gay capital seems to thrive in spite of his maledictions.



FIRE AT SERGY

“TRUM-trum-trum-a-tum-tum-tum!” the drum sounding the alarm of fire, calling on all to turn out and lend a hand to suppress the danger before the thatched roofs, which burn like tinder, catch and spread destruction through the village.

Hats are seized in haste, doors thrown open; men and women rush, startled and anxious, to meet the drummer. “Where is the fire?”

“ Trum - trum - trum-a-tum-tum - tum — ” ominously and slowly the sound advances, spreading consternation and terror. The women, pale, in groups, excitedly gesticulate and wring their hands. Young girls, in their excitement, weep. The sound of that terrible drum sends a shiver through all.

Now the drummer has reached the “ Mairie,” the end of his beat. Another takes his place and continues the alarm to Rémy, the neighboring village, while the church-bell steadily clangs its accompanying tocsin.

It seems that the fire is at Sergy, the suburb of Valombre. The old people climb the hill and look away to where the smoke is rising. By their knowledge of the country, the result of half a century's existence in this one locality, they accurately place it, even tell the exact house,—the grange by the walnuts near the station on the old road. They know it well; old So-and-So's place. Ah yes, it reminds them of the last fire, and soon their wells of reminiscence are working. Each has some new detail to add. Thus they calm their impatience while the others are away.

Off on a trot the younger men start ; even the women follow. No one will miss a fire. And soon the usually quiet village presents a long array of noisily shuffling legs and sabots.

Prosper dashes up with his team, calling for volunteers. In we jump, and away. The spirited stallion has also become excited, and springs joyously to his work. Rein him up ! another peasant is to be taken in. "Keep on," he cries, and clambers in at the back. Off again. "Ho, François, climb up," slowing a little for an instant, then away again at a madly increasing pace. Women and children fly out of the road. Look out ! "We had better be late than kill any one," sagely suggests the "forest guard." Get out of the road then ! Hola ! dash and clatter, with the horse snorting and sweating, we ride up through the growing crowd to the scene of excitement.

The native farmer-firemen have already mounted their primitive pump, and a stream is shooting its spray among the smoking rafters.

All volunteers, those two long rows of bucket-passers feeding the machine from wells, or pumps, a hundred yards away.

A motley gang,— here an old woman, still wiry, passes the streaming canvas bucket to her neighbor, a bright lass ; she in turn hands it on to the stalwart tow-headed youth beside her, he to the town-crier, next to the clerk, then to a burly peasant, red and sweating, but with his whole heart in the work, and so on through fifty willing hands to the firemen, who pour the libation into the maw of the all-consuming though innocent-looking hand-pump engine.

Six brawny, sweating, red, and enthusiastic peasants, firemen peasants, and farmer peasants, it is all one, sway furiously up and down, forcing the thin stream through the hose, up, up, not to the clouds, only thirty feet, but still quite enough for the needs of the occasion.

Old-fashioned brass helmets glisten in the sun, only a little brighter than those shining excited faces beneath, — a most novel and thrillingly picturesque group of brilliant color and changing light and shade.

Between the fire and water the old rafters gradually become a harmless wreck, and soon

all danger is past. Gayety takes the place of anxiety. Yet still the pump-handles bang up and down, faster and faster. "Why?" "Oh! only to let off a little steam." Every one is now warmed to his work, and does n't want to give it up.

Where but a few moments before was a real danger, now the scene is fast developing into a hilariously good time, a real picnic.

Water is shot around promiscuously, uselessly now; but they can't give it up so soon. It would n't be worth so much trouble. "So keep it up," until it almost becomes like a children's carnival. All laugh, none criticise; a happy lot, rejuvenated for the moment.

But the end must come; there is now no longer a possible excuse for deluging the country. So gradually it slows down, and the pump is folded up, literally as well as figuratively speaking.

Then the *marchand de vin* (saloon-keeper) does a thriving business for a short time; as of course one must take a little glass after such an excitement, and talk over the thrilling or otherwise details of the affair, —

a subject of conversation which will stand them in good stead for many days to come.

And the fire of Sergy is resolved into history, to gain, as does most history, with its age: like a rolling snowball gathering new material along the way, — material which, though possibly factitious, will not detract from the charm of the story.



“PEAUX DE LAPINS !”

INCESSANTLY I seem to hear the cry of “Po ! Po ! Peaux de lapins !” The buyer of rabbit-skins, a sturdy, red-faced, and red-headed lout, stalks along with his rack strapped to his shoulders, with here and there a few rabbit-skins dangling, stiff and ugly, behind him.

Every one, more or less, raises rabbits for home consumption ; he buys the skins for a few sous apiece, and resells them to a manufacturer of fur toys, tobacco-pouches, etc., for which these skins are used as ornamentation. A curious trade, yet it apparently feeds its man, as the expression goes ; for often, when bicycling, I find him playing with his child by the side of the river, with every sign of general contentment.

But now he has several rivals in the field. I doubt there being enough rabbit-skins in

Valombre to support three men. Still they stick to it. And when I don't hear one, the other is sure to be at hand with his amusingly lugubrious cry of “Po! Po!”

I am anxious to see how the competition will end; my sympathies are with the original tramp, his uncouthness having quite won me.



THE FOURTEENTH OF JULY

LAST night the *fête* opened with the customary torchlight procession. The small boys were happy. Drummers and trumpeters struck up the march, and through the village wound the picturesque procession, the gamins leading, bearing Chinese lanterns

attached to long poles. Behind them came the musicians, playing in earnest ; then the firemen, with huge, flaming torches. Men and boys gradually joined the ranks, and the company steadily swelled, gaining new recruits at every halt for drinks.



The effect of the lights coming up the street, out of the darkness, was very pretty ; and, though I had already seen several similar parades, I enjoyed its simple picturesqueness as much as ever.

After winding through the main street, from one end of the village to the other, that everybody should have some of the show, as Palmyre put it, they halted before

the "Mairie," and closed the performance with a spirited rendering of the "Marseillaise." Colignon, master of ceremonies, — that ubiquitous haircutter, bar-tender, shoemaker, musician, and general-utility man, — was in his glory. Proudly he threw his shoulders back and beat the measure, sympathetically modifying his dignified rigidity with the touching parts of the music. The faithful band did its best, each man playing as though his life depended on it, great cords standing out on sturdy necks, eyes reaching out towards the music sheet. To them their functions appear as a serious matter, and they put their whole soul into the work; while the sympathetic audience attentively drank in their strains.

Numerous rounds of drinks kept the enthusiasm up to "Marseillaise" pitch, and the *fête* was ushered in with the proper spirit.

To-day the band, in full force, assembled on the village green. The mayor impressively presented the flags to the standard-bearers. Then the music religiously struck up the "Marseillaise," the mayor and local authorities respectfully standing bareheaded.

Another patriotic air followed close on the heels of the "Marseillaise," and now the celebration was officially under way.

Down the street again filed the noisy, enthusiastic band. Again every man played



with his whole soul ; and off they went to give the people of Sergy their share of "Marseillaise."

Meanwhile the gymnastic society, which had just put in an appearance, performed in the public square. The young boys, in their white costumes, looked bright and smart. In turn they performed on the horizontal bar and

parallel bars; then went through the squad drill, with some very pretty figures; and they did it with a good hearty spirit. What was lacking in harmony of movement was made up by individual energy, quite as one would wish from a club of boys who spent their time in the fields ploughing or harvesting.

After the gymnastic performances, the firemen gave their little exhibition. Good, honest souls, though they work with a will, they are fated always to look very funny. Their sincerity and seriousness alone are ludicrous. As though the safety of the village depended on their drill, they do it with all their hearts, obeying orders like clock-work, clock-work sadly out of order, one always a little behind the other, — in their enthusiasm to rush up a ladder, dropping an axe, and having ignominiously to come down again for it.

Now, in the middle of their performance, band music is heard coming up the street. The spectators cruelly slight the show, and rush off to see the new attraction. It is the Rémy fire-brigade, also playing. Their chief draws them up in line, or, rather, pushes them

individually into position. The mayor of Valombre reviews them, and does the honors, inviting all hands to take a drink. In a moment the door of the saloon is alive with a stream of humanity struggling in. Everybody, more or less, joins the firemen in their libations.

A few vigorous tunes from the band, and gradually the crowd disperses. It is dinner-time.

Night brings every one back. A row of Chinese lanterns, alternated with different colored glasses, burning tallow wicks, strung on a wire stretched around and through the "square," light up the green. Here the ball is to be held.

The crowd gathers steadily ; the girls waiting impatiently for the dancing to begin. Four chairs, placed on a slightly elevated platform, await the musicians, who seem slow in coming. The crowd is growing impatient. Ah ! at last, there they are ! They wire and scrape to tune their fiddles, and finally play a waltz.

Timidly the first couple steps forward ; the

movement is given. From every side the rush fills the green. Sturdy peasants swing their partners around the square. The grass has been cut, but the ground is fearfully uneven. Hopping is the order of the day, or, rather, night.

Bumping and butting each other, the noisy couples labor across the green, up and down, then across, and so on, until the orchestra decides that this dance has had enough music, and stops.

The old women are grouped about the enclosure, smiling and happy. The few benches are crowded; standing room only is the order of things.

Picturesque groups of spectators, old men, old women, dressed up for the occasion, look gleefully on. The young girls, of course, are in their best; the boys likewise. Here and there a group of city people add their note of color, with the bright costumes of the women; while a steady movement saunters round and round. Occasionally a new couple is caught by the music, and springs into the arena; away they go, up and down, round and off.

A happy peasant who has drunk too much starts across the ring, dancing his way, occa-



sionally colliding with some one. But everybody is too happy to mind such a trifle ; and he

safely reaches the other end, only to start wildly back again.

Still it is surprising how few drunken people are to be seen, though thus at the end of a day's *fête*, when more might reasonably have been expected.

The musicians take but a short rest between dances, and start the movement again, steadily growing livelier and noisier. The polka and quadrille are the popular dances, — a quadrille quite old-fashioned and decidedly picturesque in its curious figures and turns. Even the clumsiest peasant has his dance, dragging his partner after him, if not gracefully, at least with a will.

And so it goes, hour after hour, getting noisier and happier. Twelve o'clock has struck. Still the movement is as lively as ever; enthusiasm is aroused. Valombre only gets a chance once a year, so she intends getting all the good out of it while it is going.

Towards one o'clock the dancers become thinned out. And now the timid and awkward, who have been waiting a quiet

moment, try their luck. Fat women and clumsy men, — everybody must be able to say that he has danced.

Two o'clock. The roads leading in different directions are spotted with tired groups, working homewards by moonlight. Here and there an extra-tired figure lurches up against a wall, rebounding into the street, drunk, but happy and harmless.

For hours still I hear the violins squeaking away. The noise from the "green" becomes feebler and feebler; gradually the weary orchestra thinks that it is time to stop, and the ball is ended, to be repeated just one year from date.



DÉSIRÉ

HALF-PAST eleven was striking by the "Mairie" clock as, through the mud and darkness, I trudged back from the dépôt, where I had seen a friend off for Paris, warily picking my steps to avoid floundering into some treacherous pool too deep for my sabots.

As I turned up my lane, a miscalculated lurch sent me splashing into a good-sized brook, a creation of the late storm. While wading out of this as best I could, signs of unusual commotion met my eyes. Through

Célestine's open door the light was streaming out into the rainy night. Something, I felt, must be going wrong to have kept the old folks up till this late hour.

Hastening forward, I was met at the threshold by the old woman, who had advanced on hearing my step. Rushing out, she seized me convulsively by the arm, crying: "*O Mon Dieu! Monsieur!* my poor man is dying!" On entering, I found old Désiré stretched on his bed gasping for breath, a couple of neighbors, old women, staring impotently but sympathetically at the sufferer.

The old man appeared to be at the point of death, an ominous rattle in his throat, his arms and hands quite cold. The sight was pitiful, — this poor old storm-and-weather-worn pair, both over seventy, thus apparently to be torn abruptly apart after half a century of life together. Though I felt that the end was approaching, I tried to encourage the old woman by telling her that there was no immediate danger; that the doctor would soon be here, and all be well. But, to add to the calamity, the local doctor

was away at "L'Isle Adam," four miles up the river, and we feared that the old neighbor, Auguste, sent out would miss the last train and have to go on foot, necessitating a longer wait.

The situation was painfully trying as, without being able to help him, we watched the poor old man suffering his life away, no one knowing what to do, and each anxious to do something. The application of mustard plasters exhausting our knowledge of emergency treatment, we could only helplessly wait and watch the painfully slow-moving hand of the clock, calculating the time when the doctor, if found, might arrive. Every minute seemed an hour ; and we grew old waiting.

Célestine sat by the bedside, silently suffering, her shadow thrown grotesquely on the wall as though to mock at her grief. The pinched face of Désiré, with its many wrinkles, earned in the battles of life, was distorted by the intense suffering which welled up from his heaving chest. From time to time, in agony, he feebly threw up his hand, tossing his poor old head from side to side,

groaning, "I 'm dying," or "Pray God that I die;" to which the old woman earnestly responded, "No; pray God that you live, on the contrary."

And thus for three hours the agony continued, and still no doctor.



Carvol had volunteered to go for Achille, the sick man's son, who lived at Bléville, also four miles away; and, just when waiting had become torture, he arrived, breathless and bareheaded. Célestine threw herself into his arms and wept her pent-up tears. After embracing his mother,

Achille, a fine-strapping blacksmith of about thirty-eight years of age, hung over the bed to kiss his father, crying, "Papa, what's the matter?" Finding that we had been waiting for the doctor, and feeling the importance of every minute, he dashed out to rouse the butcher and borrow his horse, to find the doctor at any cost. His anxiety and mental suffering were painful as he tore up and down before the butcher's door, knocking and calling, waking the echoes throughout the deathly quiet village.

The rain beat ruthlessly down; the storm-clouds dashed rapidly across the face of the moon, adding to the sadness of the moment; but, though now drenched to the skin, he did not feel the rain or wind. He could not rouse an answer from within, and, too impatient to wait, started at a run down the street for another neighbor's, where he might find a horse, leaving me to bang away at the butcher's door. Fortunately, just here, the long-hoped-for doctor drove up, splashing through the mud. Auguste clambered out of the carriage to show the way, while Achille fairly dragged the doctor along.

Our relief was mighty. The strain of thus impotently and impatiently waiting had become agonizing; and now that he who could do something was here, we breathed again, and hailed him as a savior. Rosalie could not refrain from announcing it in her way, saying, "Just the same it makes you breathe freer when some one is here in whom you have confidence," and her remark summed up our feeling.

The doctor hastily examined the patient, listening to the heart's now enfeebled sound, the movement of the lungs, etc. After a few brief questions, and, demanding a piece of paper, he sat down and quickly wrote out a prescription, announcing the trouble as a congestion of the lungs, ordering immediate plasters all over the patient — legs, arms, back, and front.

The old man, who seemed to have fallen into a comatose state, aroused at once under the influence of the doctor's presence, showing decided signs of life, though, when the latter had left, the reaction from this excitement left him quite prostrated.

Achille went off on the run with his prescription. The apothecary lived across the river another two miles away. Everybody and everything seemed to be at unreasonable distances, out of reach, this night above all.

A feeling of half tranquillity now pervaded the room for a moment, when, suddenly, another doctor who had been sent for first, but not found, came in. On examining the sick man he pronounced the same diagnosis as the other, and, though now his services were not needed, his medical pride at the idea of a competitor having been before him was aroused, and he set to work applying improvised "dry cups" to the patient's breast. This consisted in heating and expanding the air in an ordinary glass by burning in it a piece of paper; then, hastily turning the glass bottom up on the chest of the sufferer, the rarefied air enclosed at once creating a suction that raised a large swelling beneath the glass and relieved the congested blood-vessels. The results of this operation were quite wonderful, and, after applying a dozen

or more, the relief shown by the old man was most decided. His extremities again became warm, his eyes brightened, and his breathing became easier and more regular. He himself took an active interest in the proceeding, remarking, "That relieves me," though at first, as a stolid peasant, he had resisted, saying, "It 'll do no good." By the time Achille got back, he was out of all immediate danger, being even bright enough to crack a joke on the sad appearance of so many empty glasses. Reaching out his hand, he beckoned to me. As I advanced and took it, he thanked me gratefully for my efforts. I tried to cheer him, speaking into his ear on account of his deafness, telling him that we would soon have him up; but he seemed sceptical about that, saying dolefully, "I guess I'm finished."

Now, as peace and happiness had again come into the hearts of the assistants, seeing that I could be of no further assistance, I went out, bidding all good-night. Day was breaking.

Later in the day, when I looked in, he was

doing as well as could be expected, but very impatient at being forced to lie abed. Achille, tired out, was trying hard to keep awake; while Célestine, busy about her work, showed the strain much less than he did.

In a few days Désiré was up, sitting in the sun, pale and weak. In answer to my queries as to the state of things, he sadly responded, "It does n't go at all." He wanted to get to work again.

Gradually he gained strength and walked, or rather hobbled, around like a broken-down old horse, simply waiting for death. But, little by little, he grew stronger, and took advantage of it to work in the fields. Faithful old draught-horse, work had become such a part of himself that he was ill from being kept from it.

Some days later, when we had come to the conclusion that he was well out of danger, I was breathlessly informed by Rosalie, one morning, that the old man had had another attack during the night, and had nearly passed away. I hastened at once to the

cottage to see him, and found him sadly wrenched and wasted after his night's ordeal. He shook hands with me, but could say nothing.

Day after day, days drawn out into weeks, the old man keeps up the fight with death. But he must soon go. Occasionally he becomes delirious, and seems to live again the past, when, having been embroiled in the resistance to Napoleon the Third's *coup d'état*, he was arrested and tried for his life. Once, raising himself suddenly in bed, he pointed to a corner, crying that his enemies were there, coming to take him again; then, seeing his son, he shouted, "We two, 'Lantern,'" the son having acquired the nickname as a boy, — "we two will make a republic."

Célestine fusses about from one end of the room to the other, keeping up a desultory conversation, mainly with herself: "Wait, old man, we're going to fix you up a soup;" "One can see by his voice that he's getting better;" "I really was afraid, *mon enfant*, you know."

Achille comes in hungry, and sets to eat-

ing bread and asparagus furiously and noisily. The old man, aroused by the proceeding, whispers, "I'll have a little soup too, you know." "All right, then," responds Célestine, "you're going to have it," and bustles about the stove, lighting the fire with a bunch of dried pea husks. It splutters a moment, then goes out. "Did any one ever see such a contrarying thing?" she says; "but one can't keep the stove going all day in this hot weather. Bother to bother! wait a little." Another effort, another failure. The draught is poor. Finally it catches; the soup is heated; too hot! she passes it into a plate to cool, then hands it to the sick man, with many encouraging comments. He has suddenly rallied, and even cheerfully cracks a joke while taking his soup; then rolls over and sleeps, while Achille desperately tries to keep his eyes open, but surges heavily forward on the table, and falls into a heavy, feverish sleep. Célestine, alone left awake, sits down and, with her chin in her hand, sighs an accompaniment to the heavy breathing of her men.

And so the old man's sickness dragged on, — to-day, bright and cheerful ; to-morrow, apparently at the point of death. The strain of waiting, hoping, and fearing is telling on his wife and son. Poor Achille, I pity him ! He walks back and forth before the door, as though to keep watch that death might not enter. Unable to remain and see his father's suffering, and in as great pain himself, the pain of anxiety, he distractedly trims the vine or clears up the garden, where the weeds have taken advantage of the old man's sickness. He says graphically, "This waiting makes me grow old." Désiré, coming out of a long swoon, missed his son and asked for him. Célestine told him that he had gone into the garden. On hearing this, the sick man's tears came into his eyes, and he turned his face to the wall. This, to him, was the most trying thing to bear, — to know that his work was being undone by the hated weeds and lack of care. His wife appreciated his feelings ; but, as she said, "I could not console him ; I did not know what to say." Poor old woman ! Only by actions

could she express her feelings, unskilled in the use of empty words. "Truly," she added, "I could find nothing to say; but it agonized me to see him suffer so."

Suddenly, the end had come; Achille and I were called in haste to see the old man die. Célestine, now completely broken down, rushed weeping out at the door, unable to bear the sight, and, covering her head with her apron, leaned sobbing against the outer wall. Achille fell over the bed, embracing his dying father, weeping bitterly.

Though all had looked forward to this moment, it was still terrible to bear. The scene was intensely pathetic. We watched the old man slowly die; watched and waited, still waited, in terrible suspense, still no change, — until, at last, to our great surprise, he came back to life, calling for his wife and son.

But now this strain of seeing him go and come became almost worse than having it over with. And so often did it happen, that a curious and, to me, amusing revulsion of

feeling set in among the neighbors. They began to feel that the old man was taking too long about it. As Rosalie almost indignantly remarked, "He ought to die or live, and have done with it. One can't always live in suspense, and a good deal of time is lost." The practical peasant spirit was coming to the surface.

Thus the fight dragged on. A few days later, Achille dropped in on me as I sat smoking, to announce the result of the doctor's last visit. All was going well. He was on his way to Rémy to fill another prescription. As he lingered by the gate, I asked him to sit down and smoke. Oh, no; he had n't the time; he must go right off. But still he might smoke a cigarette. The peasant is never really in a hurry. I offered him a seat, but he waved it aside. He preferred standing. Here he began a dramatic harangue on the vicissitudes of life in general. Achille is a great talker, and proud of his power. He surprised me by starting in with saying that, though the grief at the danger in which his father was now lying affected him greatly,

as it naturally should a son, he felt a greater grief for the *ouvrier*. This being too vague for me, I asked him to explain. He floridly explained that, by the *ouvrier*, he meant that to see that old man who had worked "like a mercenary," with bowed back over the field for sixty years, dying in need, instead of being guaranteed a pension with which to end his few remaining years, free from worry, was to him more terrible than death.

Then, sitting down, and leaning his bushy, enormous head forward beneath the shade of the lamp, with eyes shining excitedly, he unloaded to me his pet theory as to how things should be arranged. The government should force every employer to pay a contribution of so much, if only two cents per day, a head for every workman employed, the money coming indirectly from the men's wages. This to be kept up for thirty years, at the end of which time the workman should retire, receiving a small but sufficient pension from the interest on the fund, and thus be enabled to end his days without the need of charitable societies.

He had his scheme elaborately theorized and arranged, so that, according to the wages received, the tax should be greater or less, also allowing for the dangers and unhealthiness of certain trades, and, accordingly, shortening the number of years to work before reaping the benefit. All of this, to me, seemed far from the point in question, his father being his own employer, and, instead of dying in need, having by his own efforts amassed a comfortable pittance.

But Achille's views were too broad for isolated cases. He did not stop at such trifles. He did not want any society, no matter how honorable, to have charge of the money; for, as he tritely put it, stopping for a moment to relight his cigarette, which had been allowed to go out in the excitement, the men, at any time, might "skip off" with the capital, and the labor of years go for naught. He wanted the state to take charge of it; for the state would, of necessity, always exist, and therefore be reliable. And for an hour he plied his tongue and eloquence, leaving me the

simple expedient of listening and looking interested.

Getting out of breath on the subject, figuratively speaking, he switched off to tell me how Lafayette and Washington had formed the American Republic. This, simply to show me the extent of his general knowledge. Then, having pumped himself fairly dry, he suddenly sprang up, remembering his errand, just when I, in desperation, had begun to think seriously of reminding him of it ; and away he went, now thoroughly in a hurry, disappearing in the darkness, leaving a friendly “Au revoir !” floating in his wake.

Meanwhile the sick man still lives on, though now his courage has left him. His cheerful spirit is tired out. He says he wants to die ; he is tired of lying on his back while the fields need him. In occasional moments of revolt, he swears that he will take his spade and go out where the earth is calling to him. But, poor old fellow, he can only do so in his mind. The worn-out body will never work again.

Neighbors come in to take a last look at him, sitting silently, but sympathetically, by the bed. And even the priest ventured in, though he knew the ground was dangerous, Désiré not being a church-goer. The old man would not listen, and mustered strength enough to wave him away.

To-day, as I passed the house, the door was closed, and I knew that all must be over. At the foot of the street I met Leroux, the hotel-keeper. He stopped me with the remark, "Your neighbor has passed away." Alfred came to me, saying, "Your friend is no more." We went into the house together, where Célestine, busy sweeping the stairs, burst into tears at sight of me, throwing herself into my arms crying, "My poor man is dead." And though we all regretted the old man, every one felt a great relief, now that it was ended. Even Achille brightened up. The long doubtful waiting had at last settled itself into a definite conclusion, and, though a painful one, he preferred it to the slow torture of the long-drawn-out sickness.

Two days later, what had been Désiré was buried from the church ; the priest, quite overlooking his uncomfortable experience at the sick man's bedside, forgivingly saying, "Requiescat in pace."





FIRST COMMUNION

“ FÊTE ” for the priest. To-day he took first place and reigned triumphant. The little girls, dressed in white with long gauze veils, looked very pretty, as they came to take the first communion.

Proud parents were arrayed in their best, and looked supremely awkward. Great red faces shone triumphantly above expansive white shirt fronts, while huge, gnarled hands hung clumsily beneath black sleeves, grasping handfuls of air in their uneasy restlessness.

Stout matrons, suffering within tight-laced corsets, perspired freely, and grew redder, — redder even than their natural sun-given tint. Absurd little bonnets of gay flowers, suitable for girls, often decked these masses of uncomfortable but proud humanity. It was



evident that the matron's heart had been taken by the pretty, bright colors, and, regardless of suitability, which had doubtless never received a thought, she had made the purchase of her taste. None but strangers could appreciate the incongruity; and she, good soul, would never know that anything was wrong. Verily the old civilization is going; the peasant is hurrying to keep in the ranks with the onward march. His efforts are grotesquely comical, but then he will never know it; and when, through several generations, he does learn to wear the tall hat and black coat, and his wife the bonnet, his struggle will have seemed light; his ignorance preventing him from discovering how absurd his evolution appeared to those he attempted to imitate.



HARVEST, 1893

THE plain above the village is alive with busy harvesters. The rye has been cut, and the wheat is almost levelled ; even the oats are falling beneath the reaper's guillotine.

Where but a week ago the graceful plateau was resplendent with yellow rye

and golden grain swaying with the breeze, now it is spotted with stacked sheaves of every form and size, in glorious variety. As far as the eye searches to the right, to the left, long undulating slopes present their spaced sentry-lines of dusky golden stacks, like a mighty cereal encampment. Pros-



perity and plenty reign supreme. One feels better for the sight, and takes renewed faith in nature.

Busy men and women, tying sheaves and stacking grain, spot the brilliant landscape with tireless motion. Great carts are loaded and drawn away. Ricks are climbing to the sky; restless human insects clambering on their sides and tops.

Carefully and skilfully the sheaves are piled, — the grain towards the centre, ever



mounting up, up, sloping gracefully to the conical crest, which is roofed in thatch, form-

ing a solid round house; and the rains of winter may beat upon it ruthlessly as they will, but all impotent to penetrate to the golden food sheltered beneath.

At daybreak the harvesters begin their work, and night alone can stop them; furiously working sixteen and even eighteen hours a day, mowing by the piece. The



quicker it is done, the more profit. From far away Boulogne and Calais they come in groups, for the season; lodged at the farm-houses, sleeping upon bundles of straw to spring to work before sunrise, indefatigably swinging their great broad scythes.

Happily the patent mowing-machines have not yet invaded Valombre and driven off the picturesque, though, sooner or later, I fear that day must come. Then woe to the artists! they will have to strike farther into the country.

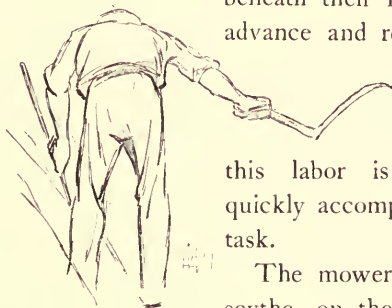
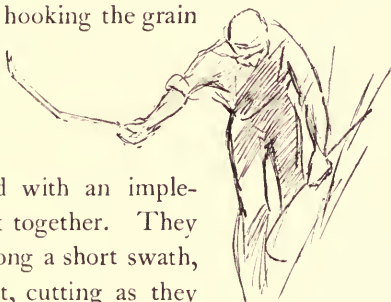
Here and there I see interesting reapers who cut with a large straight sickle ; with the other hand hooking the grain from their path as it falls ; thus both hands,

each armed with an implement, work together. They advance along a short swath, then retreat, cutting as they back, at the same time rolling the cut wheat

beneath their feet ; each advance and retreat representing a sheaf.

Though this labor is hard, it quickly accomplishes the task.

The mower with his scythe, on the contrary, sweeps majestically along, while his helper, following closely behind, gathers the cut grain. The blade is soft, and has often to be whetted.



Occasionally a rest is taken to unmount the scythe; and on an improvised anvil carried



for the purpose, it is pounded into shape, as it seems to be continually getting bruised and twisted. It is then whetted to a razor edge, and the work goes on: while the sun beats relentlessly

down upon the devoted heads of the laborers.

After the field is cut and stacked, the

gleaner

comes to

take her

turn. One

old woman

I talked

with has

been faith-

fully gath-

ering over

the field for several days, and at dusk I always

meet her struggling wearily along beneath a

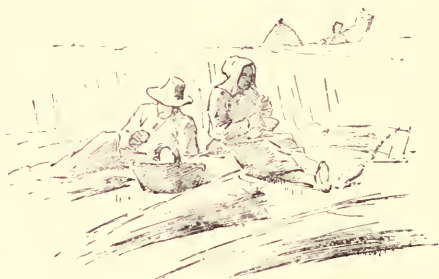


great sheaf of jetsam. She tells me she thus gathers nearly enough to keep her through the winter, either grinding it herself, or trading it to the baker for bread, — hard-working old soul. And thus the harvest brings something to all.



Sturdy, simple types are these mowers, — strong, gentle-speaking, good-natured and patient; and tough as iron. The threshing-machine, worked by horse-power, is already at work, — a hideous practical monstrosity which has driven to the grave the clumsy but picturesque flail. I notice the sexton and his wife cutting the field behind the church. It

is amusing to see the result of professional habits; the sexton, still remaining sexton, though wielding the scythe, dignified and solemn, quite above a smile, a certain stiff formality even characterizing his manner of reaping, stiff-legged and unbending, decidedly



out of harmony with the occupation and his fellow-reapers.

As he moves along the face of the field with the sweep of a conqueror, his wife follows closely, gathering up the newly-cut grain in sheaves, and spreading these systematically in rows. At regular and frequent intervals he stops to whet his blade, carrying the stone in a horn pouch suspended from his belt. Quite often they stop to rest,

lounging in picturesque attitudes on the cut rye. During these rests he repairs his scythe, bruised by occasional contact with



the ground, as in his mowing he cuts within several inches of the earth. These repairs add another style of picturesque note to the general performance, and all about the plain I hear the “clink,” “clink,” of busy hammers.

Lunches are frequent and copious during harvest-time; and I notice that the peasants while being great workers are also great eaters, steadily keeping the machine well coaled up.

The stacking of the cut grain is quite as



interesting as the cutting. There are at least a half-dozen different styles of piling employed, according to idea, taste, or need. The capping of the small stacks is a most novel performance. After a half-dozen or more sheaves have been stacked on end, the whole is covered by an inverted sheaf

so cleverly thrown as to cover completely the upper half of the stack, leaving this crowning sheaf bottom up, while its grain gracefully blends downward over the stack, thus forming a watershed against the rain.

Every one is busy ; idleness appears to be unknown at this time. The women work as steadily as the men. One wonders how they get time to do their housework. Undoubtedly they have reduced it to a very simple system during this stress. Harvest-time always gives me the impression of happiness and prosperity. The goddess of plenty seems to have emptied her cornucopia upon the land.



KAISER'S ILIAD

KAISER seemed to be well launched on the road to become a drunkard like his sire, when, by a happy chance, a fortunate avenue of salvation presented itself. Franck, the letter-carrier, resigned his position, going to St. Denis; and Kaiser was at once pushed into his place, soon appearing in a brand-new uniform, doing duty. And things seemed to be coming out right for Rosalie. His work keeping him away from promising companions, promising as bottle-emptiers, it was not unreasonable to hope that at last he was safely placed. But, alas! the best-laid plans of men are oft disappointed. After a month's good service, he showed signs of the old disease, culminating in a delirious drunk.

As I sat quietly reading after supper, I was disturbed by the familiar dispute and racket next door, heard, too plainly for my peace, through the walls. This time it was excep-

tionally noisy. Of course I supposed it was only Carvol again getting into harness for the winter campaign. Sounds as of a fight came, muffled by the walls, to my ears. I became uneasy, having a vague feeling that I ought to interfere. "Pshaw!" at last I said to myself, "it is nothing, only the old game," and so read on, lighting a new pipe to calm my scruples.

Bang, bang, thump, thump, shouts and cries. Decidedly something is wrong this time. I rose up in spite of myself, and, while hesitating as to whether I should visit the scene of action, my door was suddenly thrown open, and Fife, in a dilapidated, dishevelled state, hysterically crying, rushed in. "Oh! come, Kaiser is killing mamma," showing me her shoulder torn bare in the struggle, the sleeve hanging in rags.

Here at last was my long-feared tragedy. Out I rushed at once around to Rosalie's door, which I found closed. I seized it, violently pushing to gain an entrance. It resisted as though held from within. Putting my shoulder to the door, I forced my way in,

to be at once ordered out by Rosalie. She was ashamed to have me participate in her disgrace, saying she wanted no help.

As I reluctantly retreated, through the door I saw Kaiser wildly jumping around, upsetting tables and chairs in his drunken folly, apparently suffering from the "horrors," technically known as delirium tremens, though to me it appeared as though part, and perhaps a great part, of his folly was the regular drunken man's trick of pretending to be drunker than he is, partly as a pose, and partly, as in this case, to arouse sympathy; and a strong desire came over me to quiet him. Having been so startled and horrified by Fife's alarm, the reaction of my feelings made me indignant; I wanted to make him pay for the fright he had caused me. I offered Rosalie to quiet him; but she would not listen, and sent me off.

In disgust I returned to my reading. But it was useless to try. The racket ever increasing next door, with Fife steadily crying and shouting for fear her mother would be hurt, jarred too strongly on my nerves.

Rosalie came out in despair, throwing herself down on the road, weeping bitterly, while poor Fifie hung sobbing over her, nearly out of her senses. I inwardly cursed the young scamp, the cause of this grief, and outwardly tried to console them, telling Rosalie that he would soon tire himself, and then go to sleep, explaining that his madness was only momentary. But she could listen to nothing, and cried to have some one go for the doctor. A neighbor coming along was sent after Carvol, at work on the *bateau lavoir*.

As Kaiser tried to come out, Rosalie begged me to hold the door shut. By this time the whole neighborhood was aroused. Gradually, one by one, lanterns appeared in the black night, lighting up curious startled faces. "What's the matter?" "What's the matter?" till at last a good-sized group gathered about the door which I held, much to my disgust and Rosalie's despair. I disliked my position very much; but she would not let me go in, so I had to face it.

Just here Carvol appeared on the scene, furious. He grabbed the door-knob to go in,

but it would n't move. Kaiser had turned the key, the drunkard's usual malice. Around the back way Carvol got in, and at once quiet was restored, fear of the father instantly curing Kaiser of his desire to make a noise. "Ah!" cried indignant Carvol, "had I come five minutes ago, I would have strangled you, you young whelp." The public scandal is the cause of his fury and Rosalie's despair. Poor Fife is only frightened.

On the following day, overcome by the disgrace, Carvol gave in Kaiser's resignation at the post-office. The latter has again disappeared. And thus ends what we had hoped was to be Kaiser's salvation. Alas!



“LA CHASSE ”

FALL has arrived. The shooting-season is opened, and the “chasseurs” have donned their costumes and guns, and, with their dogs, are away to the fields.

Occasionally the report of a gun breaks the stillness. Enthusiastically and faithfully

they march through stubble and brush until thoroughly tired, returning with the air of having seriously done their duty. Big boys! the pleasure of carrying a gun quite intoxicates them, and they are happy. So the *chasse* is really a good thing. True, they rarely get any game; but that does n't count. They are hunters hunting; that is the principal thing. Illusion is better than reality.

Once in a while a stray partridge meets death at their excited hands; but this does not happen often enough to make the sport in any way murderous. It is simply an exhilarating exercise; as a boy, I used to do it with pleasure; but the Valombre hunter treats it and himself with great dignity. He is the bearer of a gun, and has paid twenty-eight francs tax for the right to use it. Therefore —

Our druggist is a great hunter, and on the first day of the season is out with his gun. Unfortunately, he cannot leave his shop, as his services when needed are often very much needed. So I see him at the corner of his house, looking longingly at the meadow be-

yond, yet always with one eye on his shop door. He bitterly complains of his sad fate. “There,” he says, “I saw a sparrow light over there in the field, and I can’t leave the shop ; it’s discouraging.” Thus he satisfies his taste for shooting, while still not letting pleasure interfere with business, — practical, though enthusiastic.





CÉLESTINE

TO-NIGHT I ran my head into the trap. I saw Célestine sitting by her fire, and went in to ask her about a harvest custom I had remarked.

She gave me the information I was after; but then, for a half-hour, gave me a lot more,

getting warmed up to the work. Her old stories and naïve ideas were very interesting ; but I was in a hurry, and became impatient. So I tried to escape, and only got away at last by fairly running out at the door, saying I had forgotten something pressing. She followed close after me, still talking as I went up the road into the darkness, gradually raising her voice to suit the increasing distance I was desperately putting between us.

Poor old woman, she dearly loves to talk, and a listener means much to her. She rambled from one subject to another, jumping from to-day back into the past of sixty years ago. She told me of her father, and the stories he had told her about his times, — the Revolution, Napoleon, etc. He had hoped that she would never see such things as he had seen. “ But,” she added, “ every epoch has its own wars. I have seen as much as he, I think, and perhaps more, who knows ? ” . . . She had been in Paris during the *coup d'état* of '51, had clambered through the barricades and over the dead, where every house was battered by the cannon and

every window smashed. . . . She had seen the siege of Paris in '70-'71, seen the German conquerors in the home of her fathers. Her husband, Désiré, had been taken during the troubles of '48, and tried for his life. She had gone to Paris while he lay in prison, to take him food and money. She had then got him a lawyer, a good one, — “for you know one needs the best in such a case,” — had paid him fifty francs for saving her husband. “Fifty francs lost, as though I should throw it into that pail of water,” pointing to the bucket beneath the window.

She told me of the beginning of Valombre's prosperity. Fifty years back the peasants, in a small way, had commenced taking beans to Paris to sell, and from that start had developed the present big trade, all Valombre now working to feed the great capital, taking its gold in return for vegetables.

Before that every one raised less, generally just enough for home consumption. Each family kept a cow, pigs, etc.; life was more simple and rural. Now cows are almost unknown in Valombre, land being too valu-

able for vegetable-raising to be given up for pasturage. Pigs also are no longer raised to any extent, every one buying his meat from the butcher and pork-dealer instead.

Then the peasant baked his own bread; now the baker supplies nearly the whole village. Telling me about Napoleon, she said that he always had lots of trouble, was always at war, poor man. She seemed to pity him, saying that "All in power are envied by others." "They wanted to take his life." "See even the Minister [meaning President Carnot], a wicked fellow killed him only the other day; and yet he was a good man; that is, I didn't know him, but the papers say so."



THE CURÉ

TO-DAY the priest, on meeting me, very warmly invited me to come and see the baptism of the new *bateau lavoir* (laundry-house). Perhaps I might see something to sketch, etc.

He is a frank, simple fellow, making no fuss about my sketching his religious processions. In fact, on the contrary, he generally asks how I made out, and shows a friendly interest in the work, quite over-

looking the fact of my being a heretic. Dissenters are so few in France that party spirit has not that unchristian venom which pervades some countries.

On my remarking that I had not yet seen the new altar, he threw up his hands in pity : “ Oh ! you must see it at once ; it is a marvel of beauty : pure Gothic in style,” though I imagine to him the word Gothic meant something very vague.

He was suffering from a cold, and went on to tell me that he had just come from the doctor’s. “ And, worst of all, the doctor is laid up. Yes, he got chilled yesterday crossing the bridge ; he had to go to Rémy, to deliver a woman in childbirth, I believe,” and his tone seemed almost to throw a contemptuous blame on this common weakness of the fair sex.

“ But do come and see the altar, my altar,” he added ; “ every one says it is beautiful ! ” I promised ; and after a hearty hand-shake, he trotted off vigorously up the hill.

On Sunday, remembering his invitation, I went down to the new *bateau lavoir*, — a large

boat-shed moored by the bank of the river, where the washing for the village is done. Each washerwoman hires a position, for a few sous per hour, along the line, the boat offering accommodation for about twenty or thirty. Where the women wash, it is open, having no bottom; and in the running river they wash and rinse, the current carrying off the soap-suds and dirt, their water thus being always clean. Hot water is furnished them extra, at so much a pail. Clothes are soaked over night, hung in the dry-house, etc., and though the charges are very small, still the business of keeping a *bateau lavoir* is apparently lucrative, as Valombre now has two.

Shortly after my arrival the boat was baptized with the title of *l'Espérance*. A goodly crowd of villagers had congregated by the river to take part in the proceedings. Down came the priest with his sexton and choir boys,—all in every-day dress. They disappeared inside the boat for a few minutes, reappearing in official costumes,—the priest in his surplice and skull-cap, the boys in their

red caps and gowns, and the sexton in cocked hat, with his chain of service about his neck.

Standing on the gang-plank, that all might see and hear, the priest, after the customary baptismal prayers and hymns, delivered a short blessing in a clever tone well suited to his audience. He said that but a few months ago he had blessed the child of Gabrielle, the proprietress of the boat, in his church, but now she had brought him a new infant to baptize, too big to come into his church, so he had to bring his church to it, so to speak. Then he enthusiastically blessed right and left, getting warmed up to his work, — blessing Gabrielle, the boat, the business, and all the women who came there to wash, — really “booming” trade by his profuse promises of joy and blessing.

From the boat, he crossed the landing and blessed the clothes-room and the clothes which should be hung in it.

Here he again disappeared for a short time, reappearing in his ordinary costume. A table was spread, laden with wine and cakes, with

a white baptismal bouquet as a centre piece. Here the priest offered a toast, and, glass in hand, wished more joy and success to the boat, and everybody in general.

Jolly, straightforward fellow, he suits his position capitally ; to keep the people faithful to the church, he thus mixes familiarly with all their *fêtes* and affairs.

While the drinking was going on, *dragées* (candies) were offered to all the spectators. A pretty young girl passed around a dainty little silken bag into which each dipped his hand for the sweetmeats. A young man, or rather big boy, was supposed to conduct her about during this distribution ; but he being much the more clumsy and embarrassed of the two, she literally led him around. He smiled and looked kindly upon the world, and, though the air was decidedly cool, carried his hat in his hand to show that he knew what was expected of him when conducting young ladies. This boy amused me considerably ; at times I would lose him for a while, though the girl was always visible ; but soon again see him still being dragged about. The girl

suddenly starting in an opposite direction from his, as she offered her candies, seriously confused him, and his feet were continually getting in his way.

Another toast; the glasses are emptied; and the baptismal festival is over. And the *l'Espérance* is ready for business.



JEAN PAUL

JEAN PAUL, Rosalie's brother, gives me his ideas on war, he having served through the disasters of 1870-71. "Ah, no," he says, "it is n't fine, war; it's sad, on the contrary. No, it does n't enthuse you; you see the comrades dropping around you, and you think that it will soon be your turn. It wakes you up, — yes, for you fight to protect your own hide; you see an enemy move and you shoot at him to stop him shooting at you; that's all there is to it. Oh, no, it is n't gay; it's sad, on the contrary."

Jean Paul, now a quarryman, stoutly defends his trade, claiming that accidents never happen. True a man was killed last spring; and recently Kaiser, who works with Jean Paul, was laid up with a crushed finger for a couple of weeks. And just now Jean Paul himself is limping around with a couple of canes, a damaged foot the cause. But still

“it’s a pretty good trade;” and when we above ground are suffering from the heat of summer, they are comfortably cool below. And even in winter they are sheltered from the wind and rain, while we are exposed to the varying changes of weather. “No, the trade’s better than people think. Of course it has some drawbacks; but then —”

Jean Paul once caught a fifteen pound pike in the river, and since bears a great reputation, — a reputation which has forced him to become an ardent fisherman in his endeavors to live up to his too suddenly acquired renown. And now nearly every day finds him with his lame foot and a couple of rods sitting by the river, patiently waiting for the next big fish, which never comes.

FIFIE'S ROMANCE

FIFIE's love-affair has become a seriously complicated plot, her lover's parents having refused to give their consent to a marriage. Poor Fifie is broken-hearted, but swears that she will not give him up; and he as firmly vows that he will have no other for a wife but her.

He cannot be married without his father's permission, being a minor, but is determined to remain faithful against all opposition, until the necessary years have passed which shall free him from legal obedience.

In a year the state will take him to do his service as a soldier; and for three long years Fifie must wait. Oh, the danger of those long, long years! The fear that another fairer maid may steal him from her is a great nightmare to yearning Fifie. Something must be done to hold him so that no other claim shall be valid.

Rosalie's romantic heart is touched. Rosalie is a faithful devourer of the continued stories of the daily papers,—stories read to her by Fife, where both sob in sympathy with the trying parts, Fife's wet voice fairly wailing through the climax, till true love conquers, when both, exhausted, dry their tears and take up the day's washing.

So Rosalie encourages her love-lorn daughter to stand up for her rights,—the rights of love. Carvol, more practical, and not over romantic, seeing no issue to the affair, protests against his wife's course, and wants the matter dropped. But his opposition is worse than useless, and only makes Fife more determined and Rosalie more sympathetic; and the flame is fanned into a blaze which promises to do damage; as now Fife says that she will not be separated from her Armand, and threatens to go and live with him.

Phew ! this seems to me a dangerous plan, and rather startling for quiet, practical, cool-headed Valombre; and I am surprised to learn that Rosalie not only does not object,

but actually encourages Fifie, risking the whole future of her daughter's life on this one move. This is romance with a vengeance!

Their hope is, that once Armand's parents see how devoted the lovers are to each other, their hearts will be softened, and the reluctant consent be forthcoming.

Yes, the move has been decided on. Jules has come around with his cart and taken Fifie's bed and furniture; and off they have started for Pontoise, where Armand is working. Carvol has gone off mad, he washes his hands of the affair; and the die is cast. Now Fortune be kind to the blind!

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His parents were sorely grieved at the serious turn things had taken. His father wrote him that he would come and see what was to be done.

Poor Fifie is terribly worried; the father is a well-to-do peasant of Perigord, and she knows that he had hoped to make a good match for his only son, marrying him to some girl who could bring him a good round *dot* which should give him a start in the world;

while poor Fifie has only her love and her two willing hands to offer, thus upsetting all his dearly cherished hopes. And the father is sorely troubled.

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He has come and gone ; and Fifie's hopes have risen, for he was kind to her.

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He has given his consent. Though disappointed by this complete upsetting of his plans, the kind old man had not the heart to separate them, and, after talking it over with his wife, gave his permission to the marriage.

The wedding was very quiet, though happy. Fifie's position was rather awkward, as now she could not wear in her hair the *fleur d'oranger*, the symbol of virginity, at her own wedding. This was the only shadow on that happy day ; but at that price she had won her husband, and could not but feel satisfied. Rosalie was triumphant ; and even Carvol, now that all had turned out well, breathing freer, lent his share of enthusiasm to the happy day.

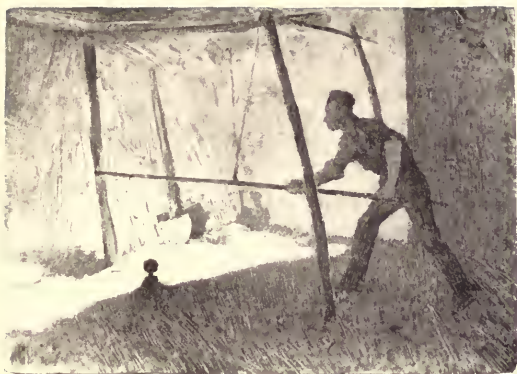
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Six months later. . . . As I came in to-night I heard the cry of a baby. It was Fifie's, just come into the world. Carvol had been shut out, and sat on the doorstep full of drunken enthusiasm, but though drunk still very quiet, calmly accepting man's subordinate position in such moments.

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Armand has been called to do his military service. It seems that he has but one year to serve. Fifie has taken her baby and gone to be near him. Now that he must give his time to the state, she bravely sets to work to earn a living for herself and baby, until his year shall be passed and he can return to his work. Humble instance of quiet heroism, not uncommon among the people, yet rarely known to the world.

And, still living her romance, Fifie looks cheerfully towards the future.



THE QUARRY

“ARE you going to work, Kaiser?”
“Yes.” “Well, take me along; I want to see the quarry.” And off I went with him and Jean Paul. After a long walk across the Rémy wood, we struck the entrance, and, descending a steep plane to a depth of about a hundred feet, entered the main avenue of the quarry. Here the two men lighted their lamps, and led me through a series of well-made underground streets. It being Sunday, but a few men were working.

As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, I could distinguish what they were doing. Lighted only by their small miner's



lamps, just strong enough to light up the spot on which they are working, they were jabbing away at the great walls of their cave with immense chisels suspended from a framework. Thus they cut out, on each side, the

great block of white building stone, perhaps six feet in width and height, which they wish to extract, then a big slice off its base, always cutting into the solid wall. Blocks are wedged to support the stone. Next they



cut off another slice, on top, and the block, thus detached, drops of its own weight. With jack-screws and rollers they dislodge it from its place, to be cut and trimmed into shape by another set of men. This was Jean Paul's occupation, and, a block being ready, he set to work. The effects of light and shade were very interesting and weird ; shade

predominating. With great difficulty I managed to get a few sketches of the men at work.



But what a terrible trade theirs is ! They go down at six o'clock in the morning, and often stay there till night, scarcely ever knowing what the sunlight is like. And yet Jean Louis claims that it's a good trade, — “cool

in summer, and warm in winter.” But to me it seemed a terrible breeding-place for cripples, accidents happening only too often. Yet the men appear to like their work well enough. They have become so accustomed to it that to them it is quite as pleasant as living above ground. Habit works wonders.



LOCAL POLITICS

FOUR candidates put themselves up to fill Duterte's place as "municipal counsellor." Sunday is voting day. The first Sunday's vote elected no one. Two of the champions retired from the arena, leaving the baker and the dry-goods man to fight it out. The following Sunday brought victory to the baker, 229 votes to 210 for his adversary.

Now, in wrath, the defeated gentleman has tendered his resignation as "chief of the fire-brigade." Human, like the rest of the world, thus foolishly he gives up his innocent but

picturesque pastime of drilling the valiant volunteer squad of pump and hose workers, to satisfy his wounded pride. No longer will he wear his sword and braided cap. It is a pity, for he was very amusing, marching with his little band. Doubtless some other, equally decorative, will fill his place. Silly, silly little man! The dignity of a rural functionary seems to grow inversely to the importance of his position and actual value to the world.

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He has come back. The sacrifice was too great, and he allowed himself to be coaxed into again taking up the honors he had laid down. He really was not so silly, after all!



“FÊTE DE VALOMBRE”

FOR the past week the village has been getting ready for its annual *fête*. Great vans have come rumbling into town, unloading their contents on the “Place.” Sheds and booths are being erected. The merry-go-round has been put together; and everything is active preparation.

The main road has been cleaned and swept. Valombre intends to look its best

at the *fête*, and the village already wears an impatient, expectant air. To-morrow the pent-up enthusiasm of a year will run wild.



Sunday. . . . “Tree-dee-tra-ra-ra-dee!” The merry-go-round organ has opened the *fête*. Its terrible racket dominates everything. In five minutes the air is charged

with the sound. Willingly, or unwillingly, every one is drawn towards it. There is no resisting its magnetic charm. And from every direction and every road a steady stream of humanity pours into the village square.



Everybody is in full dress, that is, local full dress : stiff new blouses and starched bonnets, among the old men and women ; antiquated broadcloth suits, with coat-tails of phenomenal dimensions, and even tall hats, for the next generation of men ; their wives in tightly-laced dresses, cracking, or threatening to, at every seam, the gaudy bonnet crowning all, — unhappy looking, but still happy, notwithstanding the consciousness of their Sunday clothes. The next generation, their

sons and daughters, make a desperate endeavor to keep up with their Parisian neighbors in dress, affecting their costumes and airs, but with most deplorably rustic results. The young men are clad in tightly-fitting coats which embarrass their movements, and choked in stiff collars. Red faces and hands shine out painfully from collars and cuffs. But their owners are brave, and will die in this harness rather than yield. They feel that progress demands it of them.

The girls, but yesterday working in the fields under the burning sun, are now arrayed in gorgeous costumes, ribbons streaming in profusion. They make a better attempt at wearing their fine feathers than the boys, notwithstanding uneasy hands which unconsciously wander restlessly behind to make sure that everything is in place.

A determined attempt at dignity is made at the start; but the older folks cannot long stand the strain, and invite each other across the street to the saloon-keeper's. A few drinks put them at their ease, and inspire a confidence which allows them to

forget that they are dressed up. They, in turn, set the others into a more natural movement, and Valombre begins to enjoy itself.

The children are already riding the wooden horses. Soon their parents get interested, and try it also. Then the crowd catches fire, and all is life and joy. A steady stream attacks the merry-go-round; every horse is loaded, and away they go in wild dissipation. Inside the real horses, the motive power, tirelessly tramp round and round, while the assistant grinds away furiously on the deadly organ. Its stock of three tunes are so rapidly repeated that they run together in one great crash of groans, squeaks, and whistles, till the air is alive with the din, and every head buzzing.

The young men gallantly invite the young ladies. The rocking boats have a great success; while the funny, stiff little horses, and even the funnier lion with his tail glued against his flank in graceful circles, each bears its rider,—a sturdy lass or lad. The enthusiasm is contagious, and those unable to

find a place look impatiently on, each face beaming with good-natured life.

The theatre-circus now commences boisterously to advertise its attractions, and, being the greater novelty, cuts terribly into the profits of the merry-go-round.



Both organs start up together, that of the



theatre and the one of the merry-go-round. The racket is deafening. Each endeavors to make the most noise, as noise means success.

The different booths are invaded; toys are bought for the children. There is a goodly array of

everything gaudy that can amuse them,—carts, trumpets, games for the boys, dolls and trinkets for the girls. They dazzle the eye by their gorgeousness, arrayed by myriads, tier upon tier. The busy pedlers bustle to and fro, feverishly attending to the steady sales.

Valombre has unloosed its tight pocket-strings, and the little ones are reaping a harvest of sunshine and joy. Each parent competes in generosity with his neighbor.

The wheel of fortune whirls, clicks, and stops; the winner has gained a bright plate of brilliant design, bearing some cheerful motto, combining utility and instruction with beauty.

An interested group has surrounded the billiard-table. A player endeavors to knock the twelve balls out of place in three shots; if successful, a prize is his reward,—a glass, a plate, etc.; here all is crockery. Still the enthusiasm runs high. Every one must try his luck.

Little stands are promiscuously placed among the crowds, each with some game of

chance,—two cents a chance to gain a package of tobacco. Whirl—the balls swing round—out drops a number; the lucky holder pockets his prize, and the fun runs high.

Valombre seems for the moment to have found the spring of eternal youth. The buzz and din is overpowering and contagious; each shouts and laughs; and the “Place” is alive and teeming with animal spirits. No one can remain quiet; those who attempt it must at least smile, so that all around is mirth and gayety,—a glorious shaking up for the quiet little village. It comes only once a year, but when it does come no one misses it; and for once, at least, the whole village is happy.

Such simple, naïve enjoyment has a healthy charm about it; and the peasants do so heartily and seriously enjoy themselves; they fairly beam. True, they help their enthusiasm by frequent visits across the street, returning so much the livelier.

Round and round goes the glittering, tinsel-covered merry-go-round with its gorgeous decorations, carrying its noisy, happy freight

boisterously along to the extraordinary music of its organ. The sweating assistant wipes his brow, but still furiously grinds.

Snap! snap! the crack of the rifles in the shooting-gallery, while the busy crowd restlessly moves to and fro among the booths. The itinerate pedlers lustily call their wares.

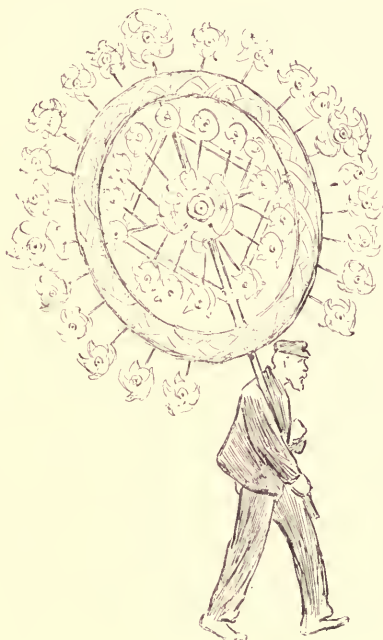


The pin-wheel man strides about, carrying his goods above him on an immense and picturesque straw frame. Children, now joyously intoxicated, rush wildly across from game to game.

Up and down, to and fro, the swings, well loaded, sweep through the air; gay flags above seem almost noisy in their bright colors. And every form of sound and motion, color and shape, hopelessly and inextricably mixed, create a bedlam beyond description, but a bedlam of hearty, happy enjoyment.

Steadily the enthusiasm and excitement

increases, culminating in the ball at night. A great tent-covered shed has been erected,



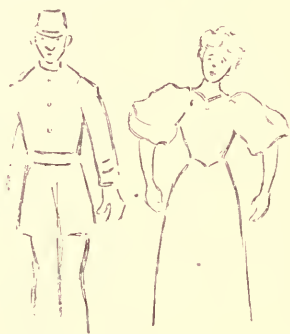
a plain plank floor spread, six musicians on their platform strike up, and the expectant crowd surges towards the entrance. Six cents is the price of admission.

Soon the hall is densely packed. The girls



are in new dresses for the occasion; their healthy sun-burned faces and hands make dark spots against the light costumes. They are stiff and awkward, and

walk uneasily in their brilliant plumage; but they are happy, supremely happy. For this they have worked, saved money, and sewed; and the glory of the new dress easily counteracts the feeling of insecurity and awkwardness. Soon they will forget that they are dressed up, and give way heartily to the enjoyment of the dance.



Both boys and girls take their dancing as

a serious affair, a religious rite; a smile is rare. They dance as they work in the fields,—it is a piece of work to be done; and though they evidently enjoy it, they attend seriously to work.

A proud, daring couple has started the waltz, and the floor, in a moment, is alive with heavily turning humanity. Cautiously they start, with an apparent feeling of consciousness and fear of mistake, but soon are lost in the general movement, swinging and whirling in hearty enjoyment.



The music, with a few warning notes, ceases. The active manager, drawing a rope across the hall, collects from each dancer the price of the dance, three cents, allowing him, after payment, to pass out,—an amusingly practical system.

Again the orchestra attacks its work, and the waltz whirls on. In turn comes the

polka and quadrille, the popular dances. Then all are upon the floor, till crowded humanity in its endeavor to turn butts against and tramples on the toes of its neighbor. But no matter how dense, the dance goes on; and the manager busily collects his fares, and works like a beaver to do it.

Around the floor the lookers-on stand thick and dense. Gradually the general enthusiasm attacks them, and here and there a new couple dashes into the arena.

Panting, red-faced girls, suffering from tightly-laced dresses, and hot from the dance, wipe their steaming faces to spring at once to their feet on the appearance of a partner who gallantly requests the pleasure of a dance. There is much of the family dance about the ball: every one knows every one; and their only restraint is that caused by the effort of wearing new clothes. Good-natured souls! the idea that how to wear clothes is a thing of itself, not picked up suddenly for the occasion, has never entered their heads fortunately, for otherwise they would know that others remarked their awkwardness, and be unhappy in the knowledge.

Boldly and joyfully they pound the floor. The noise rumbles afar over Valombre; from any distance you can hear it rising above the orchestra's racket. While outside the merry-go-round, with redoubled energy, tries to



compete with the ball; and its organ, as though inspired by the necessity of the occasion, shrieks above the din of the dance, drowning the dancers' fiddlers. But the conflicting music is beneath the notice of the happy, perspiring couples; and they hop and swing to whichever music pleases them best —

some to the measure of the merry-go-round organ, while others, by a great effort, remain faithful to their own feeble musicians.



Rushing they go, galoping across the hall. Here their great physical strength comes into play. Sturdy lads drag their heavy partners after them, bumping against each other, but gayly crushing along through and over every difficulty. And on they go away through

the morning, until, from sheer exhaustion, they drop off one by one. Tired mothers lead away their tired daughters. Towards four o'clock the *fête* dies out, the organ grunts a last grunt, and tired but happy Valombre slowly winds away to its homes.

All this noise and movement bursting so suddenly upon the sleepy village quite turns one's head, the contrast with the usual life is so great. But, strange to say, the rare moments of silence, when the organs stop for breath, are even more oppressive. One's ears have become keyed up to the terrible din, and a stop upsets the whole mental machinery. The sudden palpable silence is really painful.

Monday morning the *fête* rested, starting up with renewed vigor in the afternoon. The organ again violently set things in motion, and the jolly crowd soon warmed up to its work.

This afternoon was devoted to a variety of games, for the young and old. The first in the series was for the little girls. An egg was placed upon a stone; a girl, blindfolded,

then tried to break it with one blow of a long switch. Advancing till she thought herself near enough, she struck wildly, much to the amusement of her comrades. Each little girl in turn tried her luck, those successful of course winning prizes, — ribbons, handkerchiefs, etc.

Then another game. From a bar was suspended a small stone swinging to a string. Here the girls, again blindfolded, advanced, scissors in hand, endeavoring to cut the string. As was to be expected, most of the cuts were lost in the air; increasing the good-humor and mirth of the lookers-on.

Next, the boys were given a chance. For them a lantern containing a lighted candle was attached to a post; they, standing about fifteen feet away, were to put out the light by squirting water upon it from a huge syringe. Like the girls, they were blindfolded, first being allowed to take aim with the charged syringe. A handkerchief being then tied over their eyes, word was given, and they let fire. This novel game was a great success, as the boys, unable to keep

their aim and handle the syringe, squirted right and left, showering the laughing crowd.

The children were crazy with joy, their happy shrieks of laughter ringing out after each unlucky attempt. And their parents enjoyed the performance almost as much as they did ; they could not remain dignified, no matter how hard they tried. A grin would steal over their burnt, wrinkled faces, culminating in a hearty roar, much like the bursting of a bomb.

The happy little winners were given their prizes, and strutted proudly around displaying a gaudy handkerchief or a bright new jack-knife to their less fortunate companions. But everything is so arranged that none shall be unhappy ; each is consoled with something, — a package of candy, or a few cents.

These games over, the merry-go-round is again overrun, and enthusiasm kept steadily up to high-water mark.

Here the women were given their turn. A plate was hung against a wall ; they, a few yards distant, had two shots at it with stones.

Their wild throws, though endangering the audience, who scampered nimbly out of line



of fire, — a broad one, — brought the hilarity of the crowd up to a wild pitch; and the saloon-keeper next door did a good business.



Meanwhile the men before the saloons were playing matches of “*écarté*” and “*piquet*.” The excitement, aided by a free use of wine, ran high. Down the street, another set of men were playing an interesting game of hand-ball. The prizes for these games were rabbits, ducks, and legs of mutton; and as dusk settled down, the

successful players could be seen wandering homeward, firmly holding a frightened rabbit, which made desperate attempts at escape, or a wildly quacking duck, while the leg of mutton, prettily done up in colored paper and decorated with a rosette, was triumphantly carried off for the morrow's dinner.



During all these games, the young ladies



and little children were not forgotten : the ball-room was given up to them ; and a most charmingly

picturesque party they made. Tiny little tots danced in pairs, prancing gayly around, encouraged by the fond smiles of their

mothers ; looking very pretty in their bright little costumes. It is astonishing how many new and really good dresses show up at the *fêtes* ; every one seems to rise equal to the event. Even the most humble gracefully dress up their children, and, in a few bright hours, thoroughly reap the reward of their economy and energy.

And thus, this bright afternoon, everybody found his game, or the means to be happy and heartily enjoy an out-and-out picnic. Valombre had dropped its cares, and so thoroughly



forgotten them that it seemed for the time as though none had ever existed to

worry the happy, lively assembly of healthy humanity.

The saloons were forced to build tables, and place benches outside their doors, overflowing into the street, doing tremendous business. But though Valombre was steadily acquiring a heavy dose of artificial stimulant, every one remained perfectly good-natured: no quarrels or disorders marring the *fête*.



The different venders of knick-knacks ex-



change notes during the lulls of trade. The lemonade-pedler complains to the heavy

hammer man that business is dull ; while the merry-go-round keeper retains a dignified but indignant silence as he scowls at the theatre. At night again the ball holds forth ; and faithful dancers make the floor shake. But the strain is beginning to tell by this time, and tired humanity looks on more readily than it did last night ; still, what is lacking in numbers is made good by the enthusiasm of the faithful.

Outside, the merry-go-round and swings still do a good business. I notice a couple of harvest hands who have won a lot of crockery at the wheel of fortune, crockery which has cost them dear. Their wives fruitlessly endeavor to drag them away ; but no, their blood is up, and as long as the money lasts, they will try for more crockery. And so it goes. One would think the village had gone crazy in its joy, and would never stop playing.

Tuesday. To-day is school "exhibition-day," and the distribution of prizes takes place. The ball-room has been prettily decorated with flags, and arranged for the

occasion. The whole village is present. Every one is dignified and expectant; Valombre intends to show that even if it has been having a hilarious time it knows how to behave itself when the occasion requires. Great personages are expected; the district prefect, the sum of local greatness, is to address the audience.

The mayor, beaming with the consciousness of his importance, though somewhat intimidated, with a few well-meant gestures, and fewer and more modest remarks, opens the ceremony. Then



the great men speak. They repeat the much-used remarks usually proffered throughout the country world on such occasions. The children recite their pieces, and look very pretty. The prize-winners come forward; the invited great man decorates their brows with little tinsel wreaths, to imitate the laurel, and, loaded with bright books, the

little ones triumphantly return to their proud parents, whose eyes are dim with legitimate joy.

As they pass out into the air, with happy faces, wearing their little wreaths, their arms loaded with red-and-gilt bound story-books, they make a pretty picture. They strut about proudly with their loads. "Oh, no!"



they want no help, and insist on carrying their books, that all may see their glory. One little girl insists on riding on the merry-go-round with her load of half-a-dozen large and heavy books. They are awkward to handle, but she holds to them. At last, finding them too many to hold while riding, she dismounts and balances her load on the wooden horse,—pretty in her innocent vanity.

Rosalie's little granddaughter has won a

tiny prize book; and, as I sit before my door, smoking, I ask her to show it to me. Her father, at Rosalie's, hard at work eating and drinking, hears my request and rushes out to show off his child. He makes her stand up



and recite her piece, which she does just as a phonographic doll would do, while he beams with pride. I enjoy his enthusiasm, and heap compliments upon the child; and he steadily grows happier and happier. To-day is a happy one for both parents and children.

In the evening the interrupted *fête* again

takes up the thread. The group about the phonograph is always interesting. Every face is blankly stupid as the music commences. Eyes reach out to listen, ears are not enough. Gradually the song has an effect on them; and sudden, jerky, noisy little laughs break the stillness. I hear a boy enthusiastically tell that it's "immense;" here he hastens, in a *blasé* way, to add that he has already heard it three or four times.

The fan-pedler is sociable, and, seeing me smoking, asks in a friendly way for tobacco to make a cigarette. I give it, but tell him that I have n't any paper with me. "Oh, that's all right; the neighbor has." So off he goes to the wheel-of-fortune keeper to get his paper. He comes back to talk about things in general, keeping an eye out for business; for when he sees a child run up to me, he immediately pushes a fan or whip into its hand, and I pay. He will get on, I see that.

The saloon-keeper takes advantage of a lull in business, and tries to get his share of the *fête*. I see him at the theatre, very near

the door, ready in case a rush of business should necessitate his leaving. To-morrow night his wife will have her turn at the show.

The *fête*, after lasting a week, closed with a concert for the benefit of the æsthetic sentiment of Valombre. “Artists” from Paris,



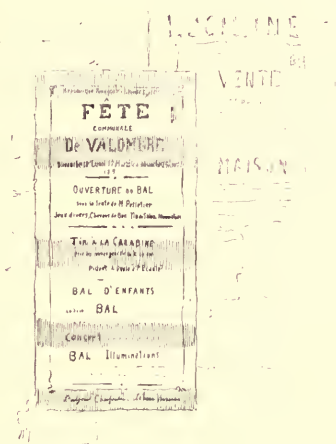
as they were advertised, sang and played with great success, receiving generous salvos of applause. It must have pleased these unrecognized geniuses to be thus appreciated at last.

The *fête* scheme seems to me to be a capital system. This one I have just studied

was admirably conceived and carried out, in a paternal sort of way. The amusements and games were so arranged that no one was left out. Boys and girls, young men and young women, grown men and women, even the old people, could take part and enjoy it. The whole thing gave the village a good, thorough shaking-up, a dose of moral physic, — loosening its purse-strings, and getting it into the habit of spending money for enjoyment, and also teaching it how to enjoy life in a modest, healthy way. I really believe that every country and people would be the better for such *fêtes*. Their effect is essentially civilizing. They counteract, in a good healthy way, the natural tendency to fall into a narrow, mercenary rut, and make people's hearts bigger and happier.

I can see no bad sides to the affair, and many good. Here the girls and boys learn to dress better, and acquire politer manners. They come in contact with Parisians, and absorb, though in slight doses, a little much-needed polish and softening off of their hard points. The genial and gentle in nature is

encouraged. The ambition of the young men and girls is aroused, and, in endeavoring to become more civilized, they make an advance. The *fête* just lasts long enough to do good without upsetting the solidity of the peasant life. A certain amount of surplus money finds its way out of “stockings” into circulation. The children benefit by the mild rivalry in pride of their parents; and a little more light is let into their lives, consequently a little more civilization.





ALBERT'S ACCIDENT

I HAD known him well, a sturdy Hercules whose vigorous strength I had so often admired when in harvest-time he swung his broad-bladed scythe in sweeping, resistless strokes. He seemed to me the personification of health and strength, and now to see him so changed quite upset me. I could not believe my eyes. Pale and weak, he was sitting in a hay-cart driven by his wife, a pair of crutches beside him. "*Mon Dieu ! Al-*

bert, what's the matter?" I asked, advancing to the cart, which now slowed up.

He told me that he was just getting back from the hospital at Pontoise, where he had been lying for two months with a broken leg. It appeared that while watching a tree being cut down, it split, and fell unexpectedly, and he was unfortunate enough to be caught beneath it, getting terribly crushed; having his leg broken in three places. Poor fellow! it seemed a terrible pity that he, so strong, should be thus suddenly crippled. At the best, he will always limp, even should he regain his strength.

Slowly, through the winter, he picked up, and walked about with a cane, glad to have got free from his crutches. As spring came on, he went out again to work in the fields. A wife and four children were behind him to be supported. But the joy and cheerfulness seemed to have been crushed out of him in that one terrible blow, and though he bravely did his day's work, he had lost his spirit with his strength, and had aged terribly.

When last I saw him, he was looking for-

ward to the harvest. Reaping was his passion, and he yearned to swing his scythe through the ripe grain again. His leg, he said, was n't good for much, but he counted on making the other do all the work.

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“Who is dead now?” I asked Jean Paul, as I heard the church bell ringing. “It’s Albert,” Jean Paul informed me. “What! Albert Missonier! it is n’t possible.” “Oh, yes, it is! he died this morning.” Poor Albert! “Yes,” Jean Paul added, “he came home from harvesting, and, while standing at his door talking to his wife, fell dead.” Poor fellow! he had killed himself by overwork in the hot sun. And now what will become of his wife with her four small children?



THE POSTMAN

THE local postman has recently installed himself in our court, at the foot of the street. Street is rather too dignified a name for our little road; but in the country one must sustain the dignity of his quarter, so street it shall be.

He has hired a little damp room on the ground-floor where when the heavy rains fall his place is inundated ; and while I write it is still damp from the last flood. Here he keeps bachelor's hall ; poor fellow, it is a hard place for him, suffering as he does from lung trouble.

In his little room, about the size of a prison-cell, he has installed his bed, stove, and table. When he makes a fire to cook his meals the room becomes so hot that he cannot sleep at night, so he tells me, and often has to leave the door open, waking in the morning shivering from the cold air.

I tried to induce him to put his bed upstairs ; but he claimed that the loft was not even fit to sleep in. He finally compromised by getting another room in the village in which to sleep, retaining this for his kitchen. His place looks picturesque, but terribly barren ; a tiny stove occupies one corner, the table another, a door into the cellar and the street-door the others. A few small stew-pans are hung in line above the stove, a couple of big pots on the floor below ; a big

pair of top boots for bad weather, a pair of heavy brogans, and two chairs complete his furnishings.

As I came in, he was sitting at his table eating beneath his lamp, looking for all the world like a prisoner in his cell. His work is hard; twice a day he delivers the letters of Valombre, walking about thirty kilometres, nearly twenty-one miles, zigzagging into houses, up lanes, waiting at gates, etc., and for this he is paid but twelve dollars a month. Light wages for heavy work! True, New Year's day helps him out a great deal, as doubtless he gets several hundred francs in tips, — some forty or fifty dollars.

He tells me that there is a great difference in the generosity of his different clients, as he put it; some giving him as much as a louis, while others offer but a franc, and even as low as half a franc, the peasants being generally pretty close. "True," he adds, "they don't receive many letters."

When collecting his New Year's tips, his plan is to offer to each of the persons to whom he carries letters a small calendar, —

this is his present ; the recipient, of course, cannot accept without giving : thus he receives his present in return, though he claims that some have given him less than the calendar cost him ; fortunately such cases are quite exceptional.

It is strange how many people have the mania for government positions, of no matter how slight importance. Here, for instance, is this man, a native of the south of France, bitten by this idea to the extent of giving up his work as quarryman, and leaving his home to come here among strangers to carry letters for twelve dollars a month. After twenty-five years of service, to be sure, he will be retired on half-pay ; and this must be the great attraction, — a pension, however small.

He seems a good, honest, quiet soul. I tell him he should get married ; he asks me how he is to do it on his salary. This rather checkmates me ; though I suppose it is still possible even on such an income. Long, lank, awkward fellow, I fear the girls do not run after him ; still every one seems to

find some one to like him, and doubtless he will eventually find his mate.

He offers me a pipe of tobacco while I am reflecting on this subject, then frankly and innocently puts me out by suddenly saying, "Now I must go off to bed before they lock me out." So I bid him good-night, and off he goes into the darkness, dragging his tired legs awkwardly after him.

His hobby is carpentering and handling tools; this is his dissipation. He has put up a well-made work-bench with vise-attachment, and in his spare moments plays with wood and plane. He showed me the table as a piece of his work, also a chair, straw bottom and all, — in fact, all his meagre furniture he has made himself.

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Recently he was allowed the privilege of cultivating a small side-hill of waste land. I found him hard at work; he had fenced it in with bushes and was laboring to clear it of weeds, dubiously questioning its success, though courageously making the endeavor. As his salary is too meagre to support him

comfortably, he had to try and raise his own vegetables.

To-night, some weeks later, seeing his bent back through the bush fence, I went in



to see how he was getting along, and to my surprise found his garden in quite a flourishing condition; potatoes were well along, salads, cabbage, etc., were also thriving in

good shape. As I came up, he was busy putting out some celery plants.

I complimented him on the results of his labors, quite admiring his practical energy; for really it required a considerable amount thus to "work" a garden after having tramped twenty miles during the day. Well done, postman! you well represent the sterling, sturdy qualities of your race, and deserve success.



THE PRESTIDIGITATEUR

A SMALL green poster hanging in the hotel window announced that "Conrad, the prestidigitateur," would perform world-renowned feats of magic. To kill a long winter evening, I stepped down to see the performance. A couple of old men, with half-a-dozen boys, represented the audience. The magician was disconsolately walking up and down, apparently discouraged by the lack of interest shown by the villagers. To help matters I

mustered up three friends, our entrance in a body giving things quite the air of promise. A few old women on errands joined the party ; several girls timidly looked in at the door ; the visitor invited them to come in, and, apparently accepting this small showing as his audience, began his performance.



His tricks were quite neatly done ; and gradually he won his audience. Perfectly at home, he cleverly talked them into sympathy, in a bright breezy manner, his tongue being quite as interesting as his hands.

By the familiar tricks of drawing eggs, cards, etc., from the ears and clothing of the town-

crier and carpenter's apprentice, he put his listeners into good-humor. Much bright talking, with a little performing, quickly passed a long evening. To my surprise, he showed no signs of taking up a collection, and I wondered how he intended making it pay, quite sympathizing with him for his absence of luck. But he had had similar experiences, and was equal to the occasion. He had



started by presenting to each of his audience a tiny tricolor, ostensibly made before our eyes. Now, at the close of his performance, he announced that he would hold a lottery, offering as prizes a few pewter trinkets, drinking-glass, knives and forks, watch-chain, etc., of course all highly burnished to tempt the eye. "Pure silver," he called them.

Each person was expected to take three numbers, the price for the three being ten

cents ; this, he explained, was the way by which he expected to make it pay, or rather, for he had no hopes of making it pay, he hoped at best to be able to cover his expenses ; to me his case appeared quite hopeless. But, by his cleverness, he not only sold each one three numbers, but then skilfully auctioned off those remaining ; and they were a legion.

First they were knocked down at nine for ten cents ; then twelve for the same price ; and so on, down, down, till twenty went for two cents. Whenever the enthusiasm of his audience flagged, he aroused it again by producing a heap of tickets from a boy's nose, much to the latter's surprise, and consequent delight of the others. Thus he kept the sale going, and by his untiring energy succeeded in disposing of a fabulous heap of paper possibilities, managing, considering the small audience he had to deal with, really to reap



quite a respectable harvest of big sous. In fact, it seemed as though he stopped only when he thought that he had cleared every pocket of every sou; and it looked to me as though this were the only thing which could stop him,—as long as there was any money in the room he was sure eventually to get it.

One young lout, whom he had jocularly, and with much success, alluded to as “gigot” (leg of mutton), being induced to buy a goodly number of tickets, and, failing to draw, the performer offered a surprise to the audience, and announced that it should go to “gigot,” as a consolation prize. “Gigot” was quite embarrassed by this mark of sympathy, so publicly expressed, and clumsily came forward to receive it; a glass of wine was the reward. As they stood and drank together, the contrast of the two types was picturesquely striking. Beside the great overgrown boy, in cap and blouse, awkwardly dragging his legs after him, the bright prestidigitateur, in his black evening dress, carefully twisted mustache, keen eye, and alert, sprightly air, showed to advantage. The

one, all wit and cleverness, earning his precarious living by his skill in play and word, scarcely knowing to-day where he would sleep to-morrow, and, so accustomed to this state of things, scarcely caring; the other, all brute strength, his wit conspicuous by its absence, heavy and clumsy, laboriously working to earn his daily bread in a slower, surer way, without the slightest germ of Bohemianism, even appalled by the idea of any change from his regular routine of life and work, sure of his home, and happy, in a negative way, to know it was firmly anchored in one place.





TRAGEDY

“ARE you going to the interment to-morrow?” asked François, as he came in from the harvest, a sheaf of rye balanced across his shoulders. “Whose interment?” “Père Romarus’s; you knew him,—Constant’s father, Constant who lives up the valley.

Then you have n't heard about it. Why, he fell dead this morning; it happens conveniently for his son, as he was to be sold out for debt; now he'll inherit, and be able to fix things. An ill wind that blows nobody good."

This sudden death, while the *fête* was in full blast, seemed painfully out of place. I asked for the details. François could n't give me many: the old man had been greatly worried about his son's trouble; he wanted to come to the rescue, but his wife objected. Constant had always been his favorite child, a spoiled one, the neighbors said; probably the intense heat then prevailing had also been a factor of some importance in his abrupt collapse. My neighbors, with the native peasant cautiousness, declined to commit themselves by giving any opinion on the subject.

The following morning I saw Rosalie dressed up, on her way to the funeral. Rosalie attends them all now that she has a new bonnet and jacket. "So you're off to the burial," I remarked. "Yes, and to-morrow we'll

have another," she answered. "Père Romarus's wife drowned herself this morning." Here was startling news for quiet Valombre, where suicide had been quite unknown ; to me it was incredible.

It appeared that the old woman was terribly affected by her husband's sudden death, and, so the now communicative natives said, in addition dreaded the prospect of living with her children, who never agreed. Whatever may have been her reasons, about three o'clock that morning, after sitting up with her children and near relations, "watching" the dead, she got up quietly and left them. They, thinking that she had gone downstairs to lie down and rest, paid but little attention to her departure ; but at last becoming uneasy, as she did not return, they went down to see how she was faring. She was not to be found. After fruitless efforts, the fear overcame them that something had happened, and, as soon as daylight allowed them to, they began a search for her. Instinctively they went to the river.

The broken-hearted old woman had spread

her apron upon the bank, that they might know what had happened, and had then thrown herself into the stream. They found her lying among the rushes just below the bank ; she was scarcely submerged. It was evident that she meant to die, as where she had fallen the water was only deep enough to drown one really determined on suicide.

Such a tragic death was terribly appalling to Valombre's calm, and produced quite an impression. Fortunately the noise and life of the *fête* were strong enough to counteract the chill the gloomy event cast over the village. Rosalie's matter-of-fact comment on the affair, to the effect that "now she's at rest anyway," was the general expression of the village's opinion. The peasants may think a lot about such events, but as they are little given to expressing their opinions on such delicate subjects, though I now know them so well, I shall doubtless rarely hear the double tragedy mentioned. It has already become a thing of the past ; the victims and the event are together buried in the grave that ends their story.



CÉLESTINE AND CARVOL

CÉLESTINE has been down sick with the “grippe.” The poor old woman nearly “passed,” to use the vernacular of the village, stubbornly refusing a doctor. This was prejudice and avarice. It was useless to have him, she said : “ It costs, and does n’t do any good ” — quite in harmony with the peasants’ philosophy in such cases. “ If one gets well, that proves that he did n’t need a

doctor; if he dies, it shows that death was in him; and everybody knows that, once one is to die, nothing will avail,—the signs of the cross no more than medicine.”

Finally she became able to crawl out of doors, bitterly complaining of her luck.

She tells me that she has had two sicknesses in her life, typhoid fever and this. “Ah!” she adds, “there are families that are afflicted,” — Achille happening to be sick at the same time, then his wife in her turn.

I fixed up her grapevine for her, as she could not bear to see the branches



hanging. Her garden is her despair; the weeds are pushing up among the vegetables. She looks sadly on, but is not strong enough to clear them out. This makes life hard to



bear. To till the earth has become the one great passion, and Célestine will die in harness. To know that she is spending and not earning, is a hard blow for her.

A week of sunny weather gave her strength enough to get out to work again, and she busily sweeps away the slight rubbish which has accumulated before

her door, gives the vine its proper trimming, and once more has things in working order. To-day she smilingly told me the signs were good for a fine week. "Our ancestors," she said, "claimed that once you saw the sun before 'l'eau bénite' [Sunday], a good week

of sunny weather would surely follow." An hour later the clouds came piling up, bringing rain, and to spare. Célestine, gossiping with another old woman, laughingly stops me to remark that "apparently our ancestors did n't know any more about the weather than we do."

While still talking, Carvol and Jean Paul come up, decidedly under the influence of liquor. They join in the conversation. The subject drifts into metaphysics. Car-



vol laboriously expresses the idea that he believes nothing. Célestine takes him up, and tritely asks him who made man. He gathers himself together, and wrestles with the problem. A fearful jumble of Adam and Eve is the result. Célestine again springs to the attack. "But before that, then?" "Ah, that!" he drunkenly responds; "a monkey made man." And he chuckles at his own cleverness.

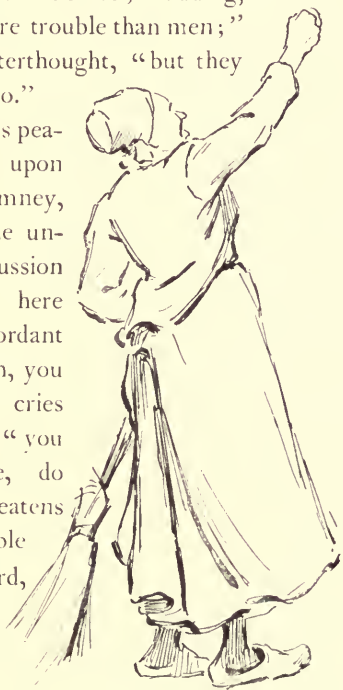
Célestine is indignant, and forbids him talking in that way. "I am older than you, and therefore know more," she says. "Ah, after all, I don't know anything about it," Carvol stammers. "But who made the sun?" cries Célestine, practical old sun-worshipper. "That is what we must worship; it makes the fields produce. Man was n't smart enough to make that, so there!"

Poor Carvol is floored. He helplessly turns to me and appeals, "When you make a fine picture, and it brings you success, it's for your work, is n't it? You don't need to pray to the 'Bon Dieu,' do you? Then, after all, it's your own work that counts, is n't it?" I agree with him, and he feels happier. "I have drunk a drop," he apologetically adds; "but there's no harm in that, is there?" But Rosalie has suddenly caught sight of him, and furiously shouts: "Come here, you drunkard; you're at it again, you brute!" Carvol sullenly bows his head, and staggers on to the warm reception awaiting him.

As he had referred to Eve's eating the for-

bidden fruit, and thus bringing trouble into the world, Célestine sadly observes, "But the women have paid for it since;" adding, "they have more trouble than men;" then, as an afterthought, "but they are smarter also."

The butcher's peacock, perched upon Célestine's chimney, disturbed by the unwonted discussion beneath him, here sets up a discordant screech. "Ah, you vagabond!" cries Célestine, "you mock at me, do you?" and threatens him with a terrible death. The bird, scorning her futile wrath, quietly ar-



ranges himself for a comfortable nap. And peace again settles over our court.



THE PEASANT

How differently one sees the same thing at different times, according to the mood, the mental vision quite governing the physical.

When in good spirits, I find the peasants and their life quite ideal, — healthy, vigorous, and free. Even the visible labor is agreeable

to look on. It seems not too heavy, but more like some purely religious function. On the other hand, when depressed and worried, in every other face I see the lines of pain, the scars left by the battles of life.

How can one judge fairly of what one sees? The mind and mood are the mirror that form the vision, the eyes being but a lesser part of the observing machinery.

At times all seems clean and thrifty. I would have nothing changed, in the best of possible worlds. The peasant looks dignified and big, the equal of any. At other times, as often, when returning from Paris, he impresses me as terribly gross and uncivilized, a sordid beast of burden. And his social, moral, and intellectual inferiority is painfully evident.

I wish to be just, and give a true impression of the life about me, but find it difficult when thus I receive such different impressions. It is not easy to give a fair account of anything, alas! When critical, one easily is unjust; when wishing to be conscientious, one becomes lenient, and errs on the other side.

The peasant is a peculiar product of centuries of servility, hardship, and perpetually protracted hard labor,—an agglomeration of the vices and virtues of such a regimen. His servility is often that of a dangerous dog who is submissive before his master, while his natural instincts growl. Yet, in other cases, this subordination to a superior class has developed into a sincere faithfulness, even if resembling that of the horse. Thus, during the Revolution, while many were like the wildest and most bloodthirsty beasts, slaking their vengeance to their heart's desire, others remained faithful and sacrificing till death to their old masters.

The peasant of to-day, taking him as a class, combines, or is rather the medium between, these two extremes. His servility has become independence, while a greater liberty has softened his brutishness. Still, occasionally, the old stock is visible, through its general workings, in this generation.

Frugal and industrious he is, and evidently always has been. Education and cleanliness he has taken to, though he did so reluctantly

at first. Through his dense brain the light has at last penetrated, almost by force. The practical advantages of a knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic have ultimately made him tractable in this direction. But



cleanliness, for cleanliness' sake, he takes to less kindly.

His energy is indefatigable. No day is too long for him. Both girls and boys commence work in the fields at an early age, and generally end a long life performing exactly the same routine, year after year, planting and harvesting, till, from force of habit, their backs gradually acquire a perpetual stoop. It

is the brand of their work, distinct and apart from all others. No matter how you might disguise these veterans, they would be recognized at once as tillers of the soil. So long and intimately are they wedded to the brown earth that their skin acquires the color, baked in by the sun, and their old faces and



hands are furrowed as deeply as their fields. Old veterans of eighty and upwards are still found in the ranks of active service. They prefer to die in harness rather than to join the hospital "corps." Their work has become their only pleasure. Stop them, and they would pine away and die.

Though the peasant has few diversions, his life seems a happy one. He is more in-

dependent than the city laborer, and stronger and healthier on account of his work and regular life. He is well-to-do; or if not, it is generally his fault. He lives well, and according to his tastes, very plainly though it be.

Here the peasant-proprietor scheme can be judged by its workings. The results of the system impress one as being in every way a great success. The peasant, owning his house and land, has every interest to keep both in good condition. His ambition is encouraged by the feeling that the making of his fortune is directly in his own hands. Paris has to be fed. All he can raise finds a ready sale. Every improvement he adds to his land adds to the amount of his produce, consequently to his income. This certainty of a ready market, and the knowledge that the gain is his, and his alone, that he is working directly for himself, are a source of steady encouragement. The result is agreeably apparent in a prosperous, wealthy village of well-kept houses, and rich, productive farms.

Each man, owning a farm of limited extent, is freed from the care of speculation on a dangerous scale. He needs but a small number of hands. In fact, most lands are worked by the owner himself, with his wife and family, so that the outlay is slight, and the profit relatively great. By this system the peasant



steadily gains ground, little by little, but regularly and surely, accumulating a comfortable pittance.

Poverty ceases to exist, with its terrible corollary of vexations, — vexations which destroy good-humor, and make their victim despondent and vicious. His knowledge of being able to meet his taxes, live well, com-

fortably clothe and educate his children, develops a genial good-nature and cheerful spirits, and he helps to form a class healthy both in mind and in body. In this condition the peasant is law-abiding and orderly. Aside from the natural sentiment which a successful life generates, he is a property-owner, and knows that the safety of his property depends on law and order. Thus is generally developed a solid, law-abiding community, wealthy, healthy, and contented.

The deliberate creation of this state of society carries with it a solid sentiment of balance, of equilibrium. Rash speculation has no temptations for a happy people. Their tastes also grow slowly, and in harmony with their fortunes. They rarely endeavor to make a false show by living beyond their means. Progress, that terrible bugbear, affects them slowly; they take it in mild doses. While the city clerk or workman endeavors to jump from his class to that of his superiors, or to that more solidly established on a financial basis, causing him endless struggles and worries to make both

ends meet while living in this false state, the peasant lags behind, and comes along more slowly and solidly, feeling cautiously his steps.

While the one lives a life of false show without a solid basis, uneasy, worried, unhappy, consequently unhealthy, gradually jug-



gling with morality and honesty in his efforts to keep his feet on the slippery ground he has chosen, a victim to every financial crash, undermining, perhaps, society both physically and morally; the other is steadily advancing with a sure foot, holding easily every step he gains. Happy and free from unnatural care, his children are stronger and healthier. He represents a social stratum which no mo-

mentary business-panic can affect, — a solid rock of resistance against which Chance can do little, capable of sustaining the solidity and prosperity of his country through every trial.



Avarice is the prevailing vice among the peasants. They have had such a long, hard time to get money that now that they have it they keep it. The thing they work so

hard to possess now seems inclined to possess them, body and soul. But yet, after all, the peasant is not the only one whose creed is money. Economy becomes almost a fine art in their hands. Many take advantage of



neighboring fairs to replenish their wardrobe with second-hand clothing. Their love of bargaining is strong; and the Jew pedler, though he does business, meets his match.

The natives of Valombre patch easily and frequently. Clothes must needs be in a pretty hopeless state when skilful patching

cannot save them. The same stuff is, in preference, used, though this is not absolutely necessary. As a consequence, the results attained are often quite wonderful. Some distance off, you see a man wearing white trousers. You are surprised to notice that half of the left leg is black, making a clearly-cut division where it joins the rest. On his approach, you discover that it is simply a patch of the original goods, but the rest has had time to change color. These patches are neat, the peasant never being ragged; but they are really extraordinary, ranging often from head to foot.

The peasant is generally very sober. The drunkenness of the village is confined to a few, and is represented by the tradesmen, or more usually the masons or stone-cutters. And I notice that the drunkards furiously talk politics and schemes for social reform, etc. Whether it is the politics which make them drink, or the drink which makes them politicians, I cannot say, but the two seem invariably to go together.

Sunday is quite generally kept by the peas-

ants. Habit has firmly sanctioned its being a day of rest. From the religious point of view it also still holds to quite an extent, notwithstanding that the general, modern



destruction of his old superstitions has worked its way slowly into the peasant's mind, causing him a sort of gleeful, crafty satisfaction at being freed from the fear of the deity, to him much like a mighty *gendarme*, to be appeased by humility. He still keeps up a certain relation with the church on the general, cautiously suspicious principle that he'll keep on the safe side until he is sure that there is no longer any danger. Thus he pays a superficial respect to the feared power. The women naturally cling to the church more firmly than the men, though their religion seems to be a more direct fear and worship of the priest than of a divinity.

Distractions are few. The life is purely physical. After a long day's work, the men sit outside their doors to smoke and chat,

going to bed soon after darkness has settled down. And the rising moon looks blankly at silent, empty streets, except where, here or there, an old woman is returning from an all-day visit, or a dissipated cat is waiting for its mate, to serenade the sleeping village.





THE "CANTONNIER "

PIERRE, the old "cantonnier," — road-mender, — had "passed." He had made a hard fight, hanging for six weeks on the verge of the grave. His son and wife derived considerable satisfaction from this evidence of the old man's toughness. "Isn't he solid?" Louis would say, and this each day as the end grew nearer, as though proud of the record of such resisting powers.

The old man himself claimed that the "box" was strong, alluding to his body, though

the machinery was a little out of order. He died as much from despair at not being able to get out to work, as from his pneumonia and old age.

Once the peasant is on his back, his end is approaching. For sixty years he will work in the sun and the rain, growing as tough and gnarled as his trees, and the color of the earth he loves, his mistress; but whenever sickness does strike him down, his collapse is complete. The poor old machine has worked until all the parts, exhausted, give way at once; the end of endurance has been reached.

Yet though he feels that his time is over, he fights rebelliously; he will not give up his fields just as they are ready for the harvest. And each day, as his son and neighbors go off to their work, another nail is driven into his coffin, and he hears and feels it keenly.

Left alone, for all hands are needed to get in the ripe grain, he pines away like a used-up animal which has lain down in the corner of a field to die. The harvesters on their return from work find him motionless, with closed eyes. "Is he dead?" No, not yet;

he feebly opens his tired eyes, which still hold a faint, plaintive intelligence.

“How solid he is !” they say. “You are tough, old man,” some one yells into his ear. He takes no interest. The next day at noon they find him dead, the old woman left to watch him sound asleep.

Preparations are quickly made for the funeral. But the work in the fields goes on just the same. “Because the old man is dead, it’s no reason why the grain should be allowed to spoil when it is ripe.” Nevertheless a day is lost when he is carried to the cemetery above the church. As Valombre seems to be almost one big family, every one being related to every one else, the relatives form quite a good-sized crowd to follow the coffin. After services at the church, the procession starts off across the plain, to the cemetery. The priest with his acolytes leading the way, the men follow the hearse, the women coming after.

I notice that in all these funerals the men always take first place, as a body, the women being relegated to the rear. Arrived at

the graveyard, the coffin is soon lowered into the grave. The priest dexterously and quickly



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ROMARU, ses petits enfants, Madame Veuve HUA, sa belle-sœur,
Monsieur et Madame BARD ses beau-frère et belle-sœur, Monsieur et
Madame PETERS, Monsieur Gabriel HUA, Monsieur et Madame
CAUNTER, Mesdemoiselles Hélène Emilie et Camille BARD, ses
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performs his rites, and scampers off. The mourners in turn file by the open grave,

sprinkling the coffin with holy water, then winding out by the near relatives, the chief mourners, members of the family, who stand on either side of the gate to receive the proffered condolences, which mainly consist in a sympathetic shake of the hand, the peasant being little given to words.

As the procession marched up over the bright plain, it looked like a great black serpent, winding along the white road through the stacks of yellow wheat. Black, black, terribly black, every one wearing this color; and the result is a most sombre mass, as seen from a little distance, of something lugubriously weird, irresistibly moving on towards the lonely-looking graveyard perched on the crest of the plain.

In the cemetery every one, on account of his innumerable relations, has some dead; and the women take advantage of this favorable occasion, where they can be seen, to say a prayer over the graves. An ominous stillness reigns; every one is anxious to appear dignified, and, as a result, no one dares make a remark. The effect of this reticence is

quite startling upon the women; tears are easily shed by those who on coming in felt perfectly calm about the affair. Even the peasantwoman has nerves, — a woman, after all.

And now, the funeral over, the family must show its appreciation of the friends invited. Wine is brought out; a good dinner served; and the mourners, after a few fitting praises of the departed, gradually come back to the living, and talk crops, sales, births, marriages, etc., even telling amusing stories, as the wine slowly counteracts the death gloom. Really, a funeral properly conducted is not so dull.

After lunch the men stroll from saloon to saloon, steadily growing more boisterous; and, to judge from appearances, an hour after the interment one would need to be pretty sharp to distinguish between the close of a funeral service and that of a wedding. The women, while the men are drinking, pay visits, and gossip long and furiously before their respective doors, occasionally shedding a contrite tear by moments, if the dead happens to be a relation. It looks well and shows affection.

Yes, the peasant has many of the affectations of his better-educated brothers, or rather sisters, the man being generally too dull to affect. When he thinks he should look sympathetic, he simply says nothing and looks



stupid. When enthusiasm overpowers him, and he feels an idea germinating in his brain, he says, "Nom de nom, let's drink something!" His less intellectual friends hail this suggestion as a really new and brilliant idea. Should no one think of this, they might stand for hours looking up and down

the street, exchanging an occasional remark about once in ten minutes.

The wine makes them garrulous, and, like other men, they boast, — boast about their skill in planting or arranging this or that. At night, their wives, with lashing though weary tongues, drag them home ; and the funeral and its *fête* is over. Now the old man has become hopelessly a thing of the past. "Hic jacet" Pierre.



THE HERMIT OF VALOMBRE

“WHO is that ?” I asked of Célestine, as a dilapidated vagrant passed down the path where I was working.

The old woman sprang to the answer at once ; it was such a one as the good old scandal-monger delights in. “Who is he ? What is he ? Goodness ! how can I tell you !” In her enthusiasm she could not get a start on the subject, attacking the beginning, the middle, and the end of her story all at once.

“He was rich, that man you see there ; look at him now ! What is he ? He ’s a vagabond who is dying of want, living like a dog in a hole in the rock.”

This was becoming interesting, and by a credulous “Ah !” I encouraged her to go on. And so on she went, telling me a long, confused tale of his having originally been left with three big houses ; a fortune of one hundred thousand francs, at the death of his father ; and now, to-day, he was a tramp, without a sou, “an old man when he ’s only fifty, the age of my Julie,” — Célestine’s daughter who had died thirty years ago, but to whom the old woman always refers as though she was of yesterday.

Well, my vagabond had commenced early to dissipate, and by reckless living rapidly ate up his fortune, his friends and companions helping him heartily ; and, according to Célestine, he was robbed right and left ; till at last, to try and save the ruins, a relation had offered to rent his last house, telling him that he could live on the money and thus avoid running into complete ruin

and poverty. But no, he would n't do it, and faithfully kept up his wild life, until all was gone, and he found himself at last houseless and without money, his youth squandered, — a middle-aged man without prospects.

He steadily drifted from bad to worse, gradually working less and less, till now he had become a vagrant, living on charity, his home a cave in the rocks.

The story seemed so extraordinary for Valombre, where the peasant is so cool and thrifty, little given to folly or improvidence of any kind, that my curiosity was aroused ; and, after inquiring for and receiving directions as to where his cave was situated, I started off to see more of him.

After a short search, being clearly directed, I discovered him ; and what a home he had ! The Indian in the forest lives in palatial style by comparison. In a narrow cut in a cleft of the rocks, just long enough to allow him to stretch out, he had taken up his quarters.

When, after climbing up to his cave, I looked in, he lay stretched supinely on his back, his feet crammed in beneath a great

boulder which overhung the floor of his lodge, while, to accommodate his length, his head rested against the opposite rock, his neck bent in what to me appeared a most uncomfortable position. His bed was a litter of dirty straw, over which he had spread a mattress cover; doubtless the straw originally formed a part of the mattress, but long use, frequent moving, and the dampness had brought about the disintegration of the parts.

A few dishes lay about, confused with a heap of small potatoes and as many skins. The occupant of this bohemian dwelling, surprised by the sudden darkening of his cave, slowly rolled over and looked at me with one bright eye, — the other apparently no longer serving its functions, — much as a cow might do under similar circumstances. I presented myself, hoped that I was not bothering him, etc., etc. “No,” he said, I did n’t bother him; doubtless nothing could really bother him, his wonderful inertia being proof against the annoyances which count for so much with the ordinary mortal.

In response to my questions, he said that his place was very comfortable, cool in summer and warm in winter. He had already passed a year in it; when the north wind blew he never felt it. In winter he brought in his stove, and was as warm as one could wish to be, etc.

I asked him if he didn't occasionally suffer from ennui. "Oh, no," he had no one to interfere with him; he was master, and avoided ennui by never thinking. "No, I don't think about anything all day," he said. He had simply fallen back to the animal state by degrees, and now existed. He had attained, without an effort, that calm which philosophers so laboriously search for. Inertia developed to a high pitch had suppressed and taken the place of everything else.

I asked how he came to take up this style of life, saying that I had heard that he was once rich, etc. "Yes," he answered, "I had a fortune, but I ate it up; I went in for a good time, had it, and the money went. Of course I didn't earn the money; it was left

me, and I spent it, that 's all." I remarked that it was too bad that he had n't kept some, so that he would n't have to live in this way. "No," he did n't regret it; he had had a good time and was satisfied. "But," he added, "I'm not always going to be this way; I spent a fortune, now I'm going to work to make one. I want to know how it 's done; oh, I'm going to work."

"What do you intend doing?" I interposed. "Oh, no matter, I'll work." Here it was evident that his scheme was very vague, and doubtless was to be relegated to some distant future. "I have time," he added; "my father lived to be eighty-four, so I still have about forty years to live; I'll last as long as he did." As I appeared sceptical, he added, "The thing is to marry a rich woman; that 's what sets a man up." The magnificence of his complacent confidence was too much for me, and my hearty laugh pleased him; it was apparently a commendation of his cleverness. I suggested that it might be difficult for him to meet a rich woman who would be willing to marry him, living as he did. He did n't

agree with me. "The principal thing," he said, "is not to miss the opportunity when it comes your way ; that 's the whole secret of the scheme ; and I 'll look out that I don't let it slip me," he added sententiously.

The idea was ludicrously incongruous with his vagabond appearance and life ; but he did n't see it in that light. "Hope is the thing that keeps me up," he said ; "without it one could n't live, and I have hope ; I'm young enough yet." He was fifty, already gray haired and bearded.

I asked him if he was n't afraid that his place would cave in some day. "Oh, no," it was solid ; though, he added, the other night, close beside his hole, the great bowlders had crashed down, rumbling and roaring. It had somewhat startled him ; but he was too inert to be afraid, and lay where he was through it all. But to me it looked as though some morning the passers-by would see a heap of crushed bowlders where was now his home ; and that thus he would cease to be a part of the world, — dead and buried at one stroke.

Outside his hole, there being too little room within, he had set up his stove; the rain had gradually dilapidated it to a considerable extent; but it still held together, and answered his purposes. The head of a bedstead, or rather a part of it, served as door to the cave. Broken remains of a table and chair littered the rocks behind the stove, relics of better days. He had told me, with an indicative twist of the head, that he had kept only these. He spoke of them as his furniture; true, I suppose they were, since they answered his demands; but the name dignified the crippled litter of odds and ends.

During all the time I had talked with him he remained stretched on his back, his head still uncomfortably propped against the boulder which served as pillow. When interested, he would roll over a little, but soon drifted back to his original posture. He had been thus all day, and apparently could keep it up indefinitely. He was not in the least misanthropic, and even claimed to be quite happy and satisfied with the existing state of affairs.

There was no mental friction ; the animal lived calmly on, probably only moved to activity by the demands of the stomach. With a reasonable amount of food, and should the bowlders not crush him, he may very possibly hold out to a good old age.

Diogenes was ambitious and undertook that difficult task of finding an honest man, while this disciple suppresses all ambition and even the effort of thought, and quietly enjoys life in a bovine, negative way.

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Six months later I again visited the hermit to see whether he had succeeded in pulling through the terrible winter or not. I found him apparently none the worse for the experience. He even claimed that he had been quite comfortable, had not even had a fire in his cave to warm him ; doubtless he was too lazy to move his stove, and preferred to take the risk of freezing. His toughness astonished me, as I really had feared to find him a thing of the past.

Now he had just moved from his winter quarters, left his cave for a more roomy

dwelling, and, wishing to be cooler, sleeps out of doors with only an overhanging boulder to shelter him from the rain.

I asked him if he never was sick, caught cold, etc. "Oh, no," as to catching cold, he "had that down fine;" whenever his nose began to run he knew that he was catching cold, so immediately lay down and kept his feet warm, and the trouble was soon cured.

He seemed pleased to see me, and proudly showed me his garden. He raises all the vegetables he needs, and wants little else,—lazy vagabond!

He told me how he could tell the time of day. "You see that ledge?" "Yes." "Well," when the sun touched it, then it was eleven o'clock; at another place it was one, etc., etc. He had no use for a watch,—in fact, no use for time, days all being alike to him.

THE FIRE BRIGADE

OUR fire brigade is a picturesque agglomeration of native, volunteer talent. It presents a motley appearance of big and little, fat and thin, young and old men, peasants, masons, and shopkeepers. Quite often they practise and drill in the Place de la Mairie, the public square, on a scaffolding erected for this purpose. Nearly every village of any size in France has one of these scaffoldings for its fire drill, the system being generally the same throughout the country.

The drill, with its awkward movements, and the consciousness of importance shown by the volunteers, is amusing to see. Everything is done with military precision. They sweat and work conscientiously, as though the salvation of the village depended on their efforts, running and jumping at the command of their chief. "Take positions!" they

jump into line, every man at once becoming an automaton ; then, spasmodically following the brief orders : “ Get out the ladder ! Climb the scaffold ! Get out the hose ! ” — now jumping and scrambling with great enthusiasm — “ Lower a cord from above to hoist the hose ! Install the pump ! ” Here a ludicrous confusion delays the working of things. The nervous greengrocer has got into a tangle. The critical chief, the local dry-goods man, in his white blouse, just as he left his store, impatiently explains how the thing should be done, and a new start is made, much to the disgust of the contrite grocer. One ! Two ! Three ! “ Voilà ! ” up goes the hose — the men are rigid as dummies. “ Ready ! ” — due deliberation to give importance to the command. “ Pump ! ” — furiously the pump-handles are banged up and down. Another signal — the men on the scaffold scramble down ; the ladders are folded ; the pump is emptied of its imaginary water ; it is put back in place ; the basket covers, to protect it from dampness, put on ; hose rolled up ; pump lifted into its wagon ;

ladders placed beside it,—the men falling into rigid, fixed attitudes, military, if you will, after each movement, waiting the next word of command. A short rest, and the performance commences again, until done to the satisfaction of the now irate chief.

The pump is an old style hand-pump; water must be poured into it with buckets, and is then pumped out through the hose. It throws a stream perhaps thirty feet. I have seen the brigade at a real fire once,—once in four years. Their work was both picturesque and effective, and they did it with a will. Absurd as they seem at practice, when at work they show to advantage.

Still, it seems a mockery to see them furiously practising at least once a week, while a fire visits the village but once in four years. They feel that there is no use in being firemen, if they can't show themselves, and, as disaster presents itself too seldom to give them a chance, they must play at fire,—much like great boys, after all.

At the week-day drills each appears in his

working costume ; but on Sundays or *fête* days they don their old brass helmets, reminding one involuntarily of the time of Henri IV., — broad belts, white breeches, and a short blue tunic ; and here they are ready to be admired, and the village admiringly looks on.

The chief, who at ordinary drills appears in his blouse, is glorious in a neat military uniform, sword at his side, looking quite dignified, and feeling so. The brigade has its own band, which presents the same picturesque appearance as the others, though, to do them justice, they play really well for country musicians ; they enjoy their work, and the village enjoys them.

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For some time the fire brigade has been clamoring for a new pump, and at last they have succeeded in getting it. Popular subscription answered their persistent calls. To-day, Sunday, to show the liberal donors what their money had produced, they decorated the new pump with flags and streamers ; and, with drums beating, and

trumpets blowing in the van, they paraded it proudly through every street, the band working lustily to attract the subscribers to their doors that they might enjoy this triumphal march, the whole awkward squad of the fire brigade marching gallantly behind, with a proud air which seemed to say, "Now let the fire come on."

The following Sunday, they paraded their new pump again. Their triumph had been so sweet that they wished to taste it once more; and, like so many boys with a new toy, the sturdy, innocent louts, looking supremely absurd, dragged their little pump from one end of the village to the other, occasionally resting at the different saloons to acquire new energy.

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And now, the brave and ever faithful brigade has again taken up its work, and drills resignedly before the schoolhouse, waiting for the fires which, ungratefully, never come to give them a chance to show their skill and good will,—and their new pump at work. Alas! fate seems to be

against them ; their courage is great to work thus so patiently, with hope deferred so long. Oh, for one good fire to repay them ! — they deserve it.

The band has been practising hard for several weeks to take part in a general musical competition, and last week went away to the place of meeting with great hopes and enthusiasm, the village accompanying them to the station, their flag proudly flying, and music playing its most triumphant air.

But to-day they came quietly back ; the flag was furled, and the drum silent. They had not even the courage to play their usual march when coming home. Luck had been against them ; and the poor fellows looked very tired and dejected, as though coming in contact with the great outer world had subdued their vanity.

Now, in their turn, the firemen are practising hard, also going to try their luck in a competition ; and every night we have them playing with their pump and scaffold. And they really are very ludicrous in their

awkwardness, especially when climbing or descending the ladders. Ladders are something they have little experience of, their lives being passed on solid ground; as a result they climb in a most clumsy, cautious way, with legs spread apart like frogs. They are strong and active, but their feet and hands bother them for climbing; and in their enthusiasm they fall over themselves, so to speak. Their absurd uniform adds an additional feature of grotesqueness to their appearance. Allowed to work in their own natural way, they would answer well enough; but their attempts to jerk and jump to methodical orders is a complete failure. Their legs are too clumsy and their joints too big and stiff for such mechanical drill. When in uniform, they do better than when in their blouses, as then their pride is aroused, but they look more absurd. If conscientious enthusiasm is to count for anything, they surely will bring home a prize.

ROSALIE'S DECLINE

TRUE, Carvol gets drunk, always did and doubtless always will ; but Carvol's drunk was originally of a good-natured kind, clumsy, stupid, and even amusing, yet always harmless.

Rosalie herself, though claiming to be disgusted, appeared to enjoy the funny side of these regular inebriations, good-naturedly stowing him off to sleep in the loft.

When, how, and where the change began I cannot just say ; but eventually Rosalie took to blackguarding him with furious tongue-lashings, whenever he came home full. And he, though at first stolidly accepting this medicine, gradually retaliated in the same tone, sending back a fitting answer to every charge, till, little by little, they both lost their good-humor and fought steadily, whether drunk or sober.

She at last succeeded in goading him up to such a pitch that he occasionally struck her; then in her rage she would go into hysterics, and matters kept going from bad to worse. Now they lead a miserable life; both, originally good-natured, have become surly and vicious.

Who is to blame for this change? Both, I think; for though Carvol gets drunk, Rosalie has always been used to it, has always earned her own living, and remained cheerful, even while she had two children to look after. And now that she has only herself to care for, Kaiser being again at large, she is ever complaining, becoming quite an anarchist in her ideas, repeating the tiresome song of the rich taking their ease, while the poor cannot live. This in her case is nonsense, though ever so true in a general way; as, since she has always been able to live comfortably when she had more to care for, there is no reason why she should not be able to do it now. And Carvol's drunkenness, with its necessary waste of money, should not count any more than it originally did, as

he has always kept up the same pace, always working, and always getting drunk.

I think that one of the great causes of her troubles is one that is now quite universal, that is, that she is trying to live beyond her means. For now she insists on keeping hens, rabbits, geese, ducks, and a pig, all of which have to be fed, and she must buy their food.

Naturally she claims and tries to think that she is doing it for the pecuniary profit to be got from them. But the fact is that she has changed the seat of her affections, and now, instead of centring it in her family and husband, gives it to her pig, and slaves to feed him to repletion. True, she is a Breton, and the instinct is therefore natural. Already she has succeeded in so stuffing the brute that he can no longer stand; but the process costs her a good part of what she earns. Then, in addition, she has become a victim of the instalment plan sales,—a system which has ruined or made unhappy many poor people by tempting them to buy more than they can afford, the prospect of easy payments being such an irresistible bait.

She subscribes for an elaborate cooking-stove ; very good, but it is beyond her means, and, especially as she only cooks for two, her own easily answered all demands. Again, she is tempted into buying a fine “armoire,” etc., keeping herself always poor by the steady payments.

All this makes her think furiously of the money Carvol wastes on drink, and consequently she becomes bitter towards him. He retaliates, and she makes her life miserable, sacrificing all her gay spirits and good-humor. Where it will end I cannot say, but at present the outlook is bad, as but lately, in one of her furious rages against him, she had a serious attack of hysterics, that laid her up for a week. But I fear that it has not taught her a lesson, as I still hear her harping at him daily.

For her luxuries, though more commendable than his, she begrudges him his pleasures. And though he cannot be easily excused, still the principle remains equally applicable to both.



CONSTANCE

CONSTANCE is a character, a typical remnant of the old stock, strong and tough as her own prejudices and dislikes, — a bright old fossil, crafty enough to look out for number one. To do her justice, she is very plucky and hard-working, willing to earn a franc when and how she can.

In the summer, with Gabriel her husband, she cultivates ground enough to live upon and make something out of it for the winter, even raising a limited press of wine and cider.

Summer is their bright time ; but the winter is hard on the old folks. On cold days, they hang over a little wood fire in their wide hearth till dark, then at once go to bed, to save candles and fuel. Though their life, to an



outsider, seems a dull and cheerless one, they seem to get as much enjoyment out of it as most people. He allows himself the luxury of a pipe, and she gossips.

He tells me of his palmy days, when, a weaver, he had all the work he wanted. He had seen the trade gradually killed by machine-made cloth, and had taken to gardening. "Now," he said, "here I am, old and blind, good for nothing." Here he tried to light his pipe. "Ah ! you will have to help me. I can't see where to put the match ; yet," he boastfully added, "sometimes I hit it first

time, while at other times I burn three or four matches before I can get it started. It is annoying when one does n't see clearly."



Poor old fellow ! he amused me though I pitied him. He had dropped from an independent weaver to now take a pride in successfully lighting his own pipe.

The important proprietors owning woodland allow the peasants one day in each week, during winter, to gather the dead wood.



This is a great boon to the very poor; and every Friday, the old women turn out for their rations of fuel. Constance is always first on the ground, and manages to gather,

and carry on her back, wood enough for the ensuing week, bringing it a distance of several miles ; while the old man, like an Indian chief, sits by the fire, too proud for this work. This wood-gathering permission allows them all they can gather and carry on their backs



during the day, so that, by enterprise, they manage to lay in enough for the summer as well.

The proprietors of the Valombre château are, or assume to be, very devout, and by promises of money and work induce those natives who come under their sway to attend mass. Old Constance, in conformity with such a prospective remuneration, attended

church faithfully for six weeks. All she wanted, she claims, was employment for her "old man." This not forthcoming, she backslid in disgust, feeling severely imposed upon, and now speaks with great asperity of these people.

The story she gives me of Pauline, her neighbor, is interesting at least, even should it prove untrue. Pauline, it seems, receives a pension of six hundred francs from a departed mistress's executors, on condition that she says mass, or rather, has it said, and prays for the repose of the soul of the deceased. Constance naturally considers this an enviable situation.

She tells me of her father, a soldier of Napoleon. He had been to Russia, and fought at, "What's its name? That place which caused them so many troubles?" "Moscow," I suggest. That's it. He had been frozen in the cold snows. "Napoleon was stupid to make war in winter." He had brought back a ball in his leg, etc., etc. He had lived to see the Prussians enter France in 1870; but it broke his heart, and he soon

went to his grave. "He was proud, you know," she added.

Then she abruptly switches off to talk of her own troubles, for Constance must talk. "My poor old man," she says, "had a hard time of it last winter, when it was so terribly cold. You remember how cold it was? Well, when I was away, tending my daughter's baby, he stayed in the house all alone, without a fire. I would have lighted one for him; but, as he can't see, I was afraid he would burn himself and the house up. Isn't it a misfortune to be blind? At times the rain would leak through the old thatch so badly that we could catch buckets full; and, when I was away, I used to be afraid the old man would be drenched and frozen, or drowned," she added facetiously.

Poor Constance has recently had a great grief to bear. Her grandson Fernand, a young man of nineteen, suddenly contracted a serious lung-trouble, which, in spite of all that could be done for him, developed into quick consumption, and in a few months numbered him among the dead. The day

before his death, his mother, herself very delicate, had given birth to a little girl. Fearing that the news of her son's demise might give her a fatal shock, they kept the knowledge from her, and the following day the body was removed from the house, and the coffin, placed upon two chairs beneath a neighboring cross, awaited the priest and funeral procession. The ceremony was brief and impressive, the mourners standing with bared heads while the priest, in the name of the Church, claimed the body. The young man's comrades, with moist eyes, quite overcome by the calamity, followed the hearse to the graveyard, bearing immense wreaths of glass beads, typical of French funerals, to place upon the grave.

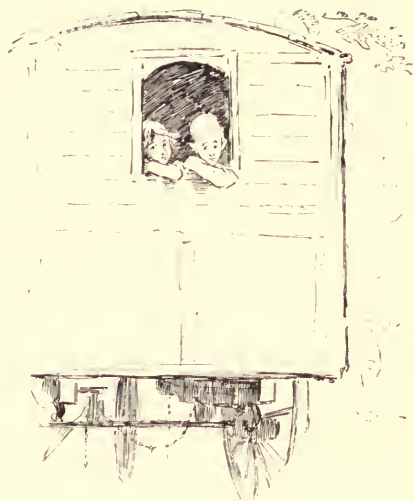
Poor Constance was broken-hearted; but no sooner had she commenced to recover from this shock, than her daughter, now of course cognizant of her son's death, overcome by this unexpected blow, pined away and died. As the old woman said, with tears streaming down her wrinkled face, "It never rains but it pours." Though it was feared

that this second death would kill her, to every one's surprise and relief, after she had seen her daughter carried away to join her son, Constance bravely rallied. The baby was to be cared for. This saved her.

And now, at the age of seventy-two, she has become nurse to this sucking babe.

Six months later, when last I saw her, the combination was working capitally. The baby was thriving, and the old woman had taken a new interest in life.





BOHEMIANS

BENEATH the great chestnut-trees which border the main road, a family of Bohemians have installed themselves. They came trundling into town towards dusk,—a motley caravan, the tumble-down wagon-house drawn by a dubious-looking nag. Beneath it two dogs fitted their pace to his; while behind came the head of the family, dragging after

him a smaller cart. A true democrat, on the road he puts himself on a level with his horse, doing the same work.

The caravan dropped anchor in the shadow of the big trees. The man unharnessed himself, then did the same for the horse. Here the equality of their positions came to an end, the horse being tied out to one of the trees to pass the night. He also had become a Bohemian, having long since forgotten what a stable was like, as his owners had lost the recollection of sleeping in a house. True, the wagon might be called a house, it being a big, ungainly box, rudely put together, boasting three small windows, a door, and the remains of an ancient coat of paint, the whole securely seated upon four wheels,—two of which leaned, in sympathy, towards it; the others, though undecided, still made an effort to stand straight. When in motion, it had something of the roll of a boat in a heavy sea.

Out of this queer abode scrambled a confused heap of children. When it seemed as though all were on the ground, still another

would appear, perhaps a trifle smaller than the last, though the difference in size between them was relatively slight. Poor, degraded little creatures, their manner of life had not encouraged a very robust growth.

A fire was soon lighted, and supper cooking. Night had already settled down; and this curious group, looking hungry and cold, huddled around the fire, impatiently waiting the cooking of the "soup," formed a weird picture, lost, as they were, in the dark shadow of the trees, their faces fitfully lighted by the flickering flame, which shone against the inky background.

Their precarious living they made by mending tins, kettles, etc. And early on the morrow the mother started off, looking for work, calling from house to house, insisting with great perseverance, at each gate, that there must be something with a leak which needed mending, glibly running off a long list of different utensils, till she succeeded in worrying something, though only a candlestick, out of nearly every house.

The man, meanwhile, had installed his

bellows, fire, and tools, and calmly awaited her return, promptly attacking the work she brought him. A patient, hard-working creature, he looked as though so many storms had passed over his head, not high enough, however, for him to escape them, that both hope and fear were crushed from



his existence, and quietly plodded on through life, accepting, without a murmur, the sun or the rain, the heat or the cold.

The group, as seen by daylight, was as picturesque as when dimly observed at dusk. At night a weird misery was suggested, while the day showed it clearly in all its sadness and dirt. The tumble-down shed-

cart looked more dilapidated and the children more miserable.

Around the fire and bellows was now accumulated an incongruous heap of kettles, pans, pots, ladles, candlesticks, and everything that could possibly be mended by solder, — big kettles, little kettles, copper pails, tin pails, of every size and imaginable shape, and in every degree of health, from the slightly rheumatic down to the condemned wreck. The tinker deliberately wrestled with them, each in its turn. Their weakness was his strength. It is an ill wind, indeed, which blows no good.

Among all this played four tiny, half-clad children, three boys and a girl, — thin, puny, starved-looking unfortunates, shirtless and hatless, revelling in unwashed dirt, — poverty and hardship in its most pitiful form. Still they played with a fair amount of spirit, accustomed to their lot, and apparently happy.

They fished in the pails, and ladled and scooped, taking advantage of their strange toys, even triumphing over the well-fed and

warmly-clad little peasants who looked on at this tempting array of kettles which they dare not touch.

As in their play they called to each other, I caught their names, and was immensely surprised and amused by them. What they lacked in material wealth and dignity was made up in the titles they wore. The mother bore the name of Victoria, as did one of the little girls ; while the boys were respectively, if not respectably, Antonin, Augustus, and Antony.

Apparently the mother, in her rambling life, had acquired, though perhaps she was born with it, a fair amount of romance, notwithstanding the fearful realism of her existence, and gratified her passion by bestowing these dignified and ponderous titles upon her puny offspring. And the poor little things looked as though the weight had been too great to carry, and had stunted their growth.

From the back window of the cart, filling it with their tiny bodies, two little prisoners looked out at me. They, alas, represented the sick-ward. The boy had a sore foot,

and was compelled to look sadly on while his brothers romped among the pots and kettles.

But the poor little girl, a pretty tot, was seriously disabled. While jumping from the wagon, she had broken her leg, and now, confined to her wheeled prison for long weeks, could only drag herself to the window to look out upon the sunlight.

A sad fate ! Poor, uncared-for little creature, doubtless improperly nursed, she may never recover, and, in addition to her already unpromising life, remain a cripple. My heart bled for her ; so much misery and misfortune was very distressing.

She, fortunately, appeared to take her fate more gayly than I ; joking and laughing with and at her brothers ; her young animal spirits seemed strong enough to rise even above this.

These tinkers travel all over the North of France, going as far as the sea ; then winding back, following the same circuit, forming acquaintances and customers along the way, — vagabonding along the highroads from

spring to winter, whether the winds blow high or low, hot or cold. I remember having seen them come and go quite often. For months I would miss them ; then suddenly, while passing, would hear voices beneath the chestnuts, and on the morrow see them installed and hard at work.

The woman possesses a good fund of happy spirits and vigorous energy, offsetting the man's apparent despair. But what a life ! Yet they have always lived it, and doubtless always will. Their children are born in the wagon, brought up in the wagon, will go on with their parents' trade, and live and die in the wagon, just as another does in a fixed house. With such a training, when arrived at manhood, surely no other more settled life can ever tempt them or be even supportable. They acquire the habit of being uncomfortable, and apparently like it.

For days, whenever I passed their wagon, I saw the pinched face of the little girl patiently looking out of her window. Poor little prisoner ! since she could not play her-

self, she would at least watch the others. Then one day I missed them; at daybreak, like the Arabs, they had folded their tents and silently stolen away.

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Three months later. Again they are back under the trees; the little girl runs about as lively as the others, apparently none the worse for her accident.

As I came along, the mother called to me from her wagon, "Heh! Monsieur Smith, I have something to say to you." I had to stop and wait until she deliberately got down and came to me. She wanted to know what I did with my old color-tubes. I told her that I threw them away. "Well, give them to me; though to you they are useless, to me they are useful." "All right," I responded, adding that Antony had already mentioned the subject to me, but that I had forgotten or had not time to think of it. "Ah," she retorted with a tone of reprimand, "you have no memory." Her coolness quite surprised and amused me.

The following day she banged on my gate

until I appeared, when she demanded "those color-tubes."

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After passing the winter in Paris, on my return to Valombre I again found the band



busily stirring about among the great chestnut-trunks. They hailed me familiarly, as a long-absent friend. Though not flattered, I was amused by the reception, and after the

usual questions back and forth regarding the health status, I asked them how they had passed the hard winter. "Oh, first-rate!" they had stuck it out in the wagon, and "You know, with the stove we're pretty warm in there."

It really is astonishing how tough they are, and how they manage to keep alive and in cheerful spirits. There must be something invigorating attached to this Bohemian existence with its freedom, which keeps them up.





MARIE'S WEDDING

PRETTY little Marie, the baker's daughter, has just been married, though her engagement at one time promised to drag on indefinitely ; a curious complication having arisen, and one quite surprising for such a slow, every-day village as Valombre, where life seems to flow calmly and smoothly, avoiding the rough jolts often met with in larger centres of civilization.

It appears that young Ravin's father, a cook, being continually called away from home to do his work, his wife, to avoid the ennui of being thus so often a *quasi*

widow, had taken a lover to help her while away the spare time. Ravin *père*, not appreciating this state of affairs, had unceremoniously left her and gone to England to cut out a new life for himself. While in that land of refuge for unfortunate continentals, he made love to and wooed a young German. The couple, with their children, eventually came back to France, settling at Valombre. A short time before his death Ravin succeeded in obtaining a divorce from his first wife.

Now, when young Ravin wished to be married, marriage being purely a legal contract in France, a difficulty arose as to what name he could lawfully bear,—that of his father not being recognized as his, he being the son of a bigamist, therefore an illegitimate child. His not being by birth a French subject added another serious complication.

However, after much trouble and painful waiting in doubt, the night before the wedding he was authorized to retain his father's name, the divorce being recognized as having legitimized Ravin's children; and at last

he was married under the name he had always borne.

The whole village had been much wrought up about the affair, and turned out to show



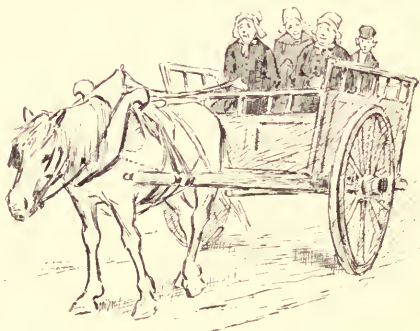
its sympathy for the young couple. The whip-sawyer deserted his picturesque plant, and the mattress-cleaner her work, to wish good-luck to them as they left the mayor's office.

From here the wedding-party went to the church, where the religious marriage was

celebrated. The picturesque procession then triumphantly paraded through the village,



stopping at each hotel for a dance and refreshments. As they approached the “Lion



d'Or,” the hotel-keeper, to show the proper spirit of enthusiasm, set off some fire-crackers in his yard ; but being rather lacking in

confidence, as he lighted them he threw the bunch from him and ran wildly back out of harm's reach. His little dog, bearing the euphonious name of Vermouth, was so startled by this manœuvre that he also skipped madly away, and on the explosion of the crackers hid in a corner, setting up a doleful howl. Pernod, the other dog, inside, hearing this terrible racket, also took fright and darted under the table, from which secure refuge he could not be dislodged, though friends endeavored to entice him forth with tempting bits



of meat ; and for an hour his nerves were quite shaken, while the unconscious and happy wedding-party gayly marched down the street to the lively strains of the cobbler's violin and barber's cornet (they being musicians between times), leaving confusion in its wake.

Across the street the sick fat woman was breathing her last. Curious irony ! Thus

nature makes preparations for replacing the departing.

For three days the glad revellers exhibited their joy to the village, tramping, dancing, singing, and having a good time generally. But the procession was steadily losing strength, the old folks dropping off after the first day, to be followed on the second by others too footsore to stand the pace, while the third day showed only a small party of the very faithful, who remained true to their duty. To these the calm of evening brought a much needed rest; and Marie's wedding, so long deferred, at last achieved, passed into history.





ACHILLE AND CÉLESTINE

I CAME back to Valombre, after a few months' absence, to find Achille, now quite a broken down man, installed, with his wife and child, in his mother's house.

Poor Achille ! I felt very sorry for him. His father's death, three years back, quite disheartened him. And no sooner had he fairly recovered from this shock, than his own child, a daughter of eighteen, his pride, about whose acquirements at school he boasted proudly, — her science, as he called it, — always of failing health, took to her bed, and, after a long, wearing, and expensive

sickness, faded away, blighting his dearest hope.

From this he never rallied ; he lost his gay spirits, even his conceit, and gradually broke down. The trouble was not definite at first, but slowly developed into clogged circulation, then into varied and general rheumatism, with hidden complications based on despair.

He took to his bed, and painfully exhausted his last savings, rising at last, an enfeebled man, unable to carry on his work. Seeing no issue, he sold out, and for a year managed to live on by means of this money.

Six months ago, when I went to Paris, I left him at this point. Now, on my return, I find him my neighbor, lodged with Célestine. He sadly drags his weary legs across the road to the garden, where for hours he quietly sits, lonely and subdued, waiting for the sunshine to bring him back strength. It is appalling to see how rapidly his hair is becoming gray ; I can see it change from day to day. It is fearful thus to watch life and strength fade away, and be able to do nothing. When, five years ago, I first met

him, he was a great, strong, active fellow, full of life and confidence, with an immense head of curly black hair. Now I see a broken, gray-haired old man, whose clothes hang loosely about him, slowly and painfully dragging himself out into the sunlight.

Brave old Célestine goes off every day to work till nightfall in the fields, at the age of seventy-five still strong enough to try to support her unfortunate son, his wife and child. There is heroism in the peasant yet, and this plucky old woman will die in the breach rather than falter while her son needs her help.

Brave old woman ! I see her also changing. Her heart is heavy, making her work doubly so. I am afraid that she may break down ; then things will be in a terrible state. Seventy years of hard peasant work, to live at last perhaps just long enough to see her last child carried to the grave before her. It seems as though the struggle had all been in vain.

In telling me her troubles, she still holds Paris responsible for Achille's sickness, —

Paris, the arch enemy. “Ah, yes,” she wailed, “since he served in that siege, he has never been the same boy. Look you, *mon enfant*, every one who took part in that affair has suffered from its effects since. The cold and exposure gave them their death. When he came back, he was sick for eighteen months with rheumatism, and now his worries and griefs have brought it all back, with worse complications. Poor boy ! he has had no luck ; and he used to be so astonishingly strong.”

I remarked that she seemed now the strongest of the family. “Ah, yes, I’m ‘solid,’ but I’ve had my share of sickness too. When my poor daughter died, I took sick. I had to talk of her ; and when I talked of her before meals, my appetite was gone, and when I talked of her after meals, it would n’t digest. Often my grief was so great, I would fall down in a swoon, and for twenty-four hours no one knew whether I’d live or not. Ah, yes, I’ve had my share of sickness and trouble. And yet now I’m more solid than many who have suffered

less ; and I'm seventy-five this year, see that."

With the summer Achille slowly, very slowly, regained some of his lost strength, and again took an interest in life. Though not strong enough to work, his improvement showed itself by the return of his critical powers, and a desire to show those who could work how they should do. And I see that this faculty is wearing on Célestine. His ways are not her ways, and I fear that she now finds his eternal superiority rather trying to bear.

To-night I heard him, in a ponderous way, endeavoring to prove to her why religion was nonsense. She listened patiently, though incredulously. He dragged in Saint Louis's crusade, making the army a big one, while he was at it, — two millions and a half. He told how the king had died, that his army was completely destroyed, and that Godfrey de Bouillon brought back the survivors. Achille means well, but events and characters of history become sadly jumbled up

in his mind. I was not cruel enough to inform him that Godfrey had been lying in his grave for nearly two hundred years before Saint Louis's campaign.

Célestine seemed quite overcome by the extent of her son's knowledge, and beamed proudly, while his wife seriously corroborated his statements, much as an eye-witness of the events would do, adding occasionally that she had heard of this before. Poor, patient woman! doubtless he had inflicted the story upon her many a time.

Such is Achille's "science," of which his mother is so proud, and which gives him an authority over his neighbors. He has acquired a smattering of knowledge of the great outer world, just enough to have made him top-heavy. With it he would be happy were his legs only strong enough to let him carry it around, that he might find new audiences. Alas! it must be hard to have only two women to overpower with his weight, while he feels himself equal to so much greater things.

LOST IN THE QUARRY

PÈRE FRÉDÉRIC died yesterday, aged seventy-eight. The cause of his death gave rise to a series of extravagant explanations. It seems, after summing up the different accounts, that the old man, while delivering manure at the Rémy quarry, where a mushroom-bed was being installed, had got lost, his light having accidentally gone out. He had lost his bearings, and wandered about hopelessly, looking for the exit. Now and then hope would come back. He felt that he was on the right road, and cautiously felt his way along a long corridor to avoid falling over the loose blocks of stone, only to be suddenly stopped by the end wall. Painfully he worked his way back again to the starting-point, and set off down another corridor. Surely this must be the right one; but no,—another wall suddenly brought him to

a standstill. Desperately he shouted, hoping against hope; but the only answer was the echo of his own voice, reverberating through the dark deserted passages. And through the long night, which seemed to him an age, the old man despairingly groped his way through the great cold quarry, to be found at daybreak, exhausted and feverish, by the workmen coming in.

His terrible experience had been too much for him, bringing on a severe chill, which, added to chronic lung trouble, carried him off after he had lain for two days unconscious in his bed. Palmyre cheerfully helped at the funeral, cooking soup for the invited mourners. A few days later she was again as busy, this time in fixing up 'Mélie's barn — 'Mélie is the widow — for the coming wedding-dinner, her son's. Frédéric is apparently already forgotten; at least it is evident that they do not intend to allow his death in any way to interfere with the marriage. He has made room for the next, and the next is now the centre of interest.

'PHONSINE

'PHONSINE and Jules, my landlord, seem to lack the power of getting ahead, except in increasing their family; four small children being already the result, with a fifth soon coming.

'Phonsine is good-natured, but shiftless. To-morrow does not exist for her. True, to-day is often quite as much as she can attend to, with her steadily increasing brood. Still she is sadly wanting in that thrift for which the French peasant is justly celebrated; while her husband, though energetic, seems to lack the calm matter-of-fact balance of his neighbors, endeavoring to run too many schemes at once, and, as a result, generally failing in all.

She, however, comes of a working stock, being born in the field as a result of her mother's dislike to losing a day. But perhaps her unceremonious advent into the world

started her wrong, and since she has never been able to get on the right track.

When she goes on an errand or a visit, she turns the key in the door and trusts to luck taking care of the children. A short time back, while thus away, her eldest girl, a half-witted creature, playing with a burning brand to amuse the others, threw it behind some old umbrellas. Half an hour later Pauline, the neighbor, noticed smoke leaking through the broken window and above and below the door. To give the alarm and burst open the door was the work of a moment. The bewildered children, afraid for what they had done, dared not call any one, and would doubtless have been asphyxiated but for her opportune arrival. The fire was soon put out, the damage being relatively slight, an *armoire* alone being destroyed.

Poor 'Phonsine was in despair when I called, by accident, a few hours later. The floor was littered with water and burnt embers. Everything and everybody was in disorder; the children crying, their mother

nervously yelling at them to stop, though bitterly weeping herself. The burnt rafters overhead showed that the fire with a little better start would have been serious.

For a week the blackened ruins of the *armoire* stood outside the door, awaiting the examination of the insurance agent, who eventually turned up, and paid the damages demanded, doubtless grateful to fate that he had not the whole house to pay for.

One bright morning, the following spring, I met Jules moving out, his wagon loaded with barrels, pieces of furniture, and a motley mixture of odds and ends. Laboring under great nervous excitement, he explained to me that 'Phonsine and he could n't agree. She wanted to be master, and so did he. He claimed that she had told him to go, and he was going. "Now she would see," etc. I remonstrated with him, but he was furious and would listen to nothing. Shortly after, 'Phonsine came to me to tell her story, with many tears. Of course she blamed him, — a story of drink, etc.

The affair created quite a scandal, ending by his coming back, ashamed of himself, after an absence of about ten days.

Poor 'Phonsine! Fortune has decidedly turned against her. Jules has got himself in trouble by blackguarding his landlord, to whom he owes a year's rent, and is to be sold out for debt. 'Phonsine is broken-hearted, but the now irate landlord insists on avenging his wounded dignity.

To-day, Sunday, the sale took place. The meagre household goods, spread out before the door for buyers, made a sad show, everything being more or less disabled. 'Phonsine had come down from Paris, where they had moved for a fresh start, to try and buy for herself the few things she wished to keep. She told me that, in addition to her many woes, Clémence, her eldest child, was now in a hospital as a result of a severe fall during her absence.

The bailiff started the sale by offering a number of dishes as a lot. These brought seven cents. Other odds and ends following

were knocked down for similar small sums, the buyers taking their purchases and stacking them on the lawn before the house, till gradually all 'Phonsine's worldly goods were spread about, now the property of perhaps twenty different people. Even the fence was sold, till not a vestige of anything which had belonged to her remained, and the last trace of her household existence in Valombre was scattered to the winds.

It was sad to see this complete ruin of what had been a relatively comfortable and happy family when I came to Valombre. And now she, with her five children and husband, empty-handed, start life afresh in Paris. I don't see how they can possibly get on there, but sincerely hope they may.

To-day I was informed that Clémence had died in the hospital. Poor, unfortunate 'Phonsine ! her cup is really full.

Palmyre, her sister-in-law, had been to the funeral. She told me that 'Phonsine and Jules were both terribly broken down by their loss. They had become accustomed to every sort

of misfortune but this, the hardest of all to bear. Palmyre herself was so upset by it all that she wildly hurried back to Valombre as soon as the funeral was over, that she might sit down and gain new courage in the old, familiar surroundings. Paris, under such circumstances, was too terrible a place to be in. Terrible Paris! I could feel that she almost blamed it for this death. Agathe, another sister-in-law, came along as we were talking, looking very pale and sick. It had told on her severely. I was even surprised, as I had become accustomed to thinking that the peasant could stand his neighbor's misfortunes with great complacence; but this one was too great, and it was evident that she had really suffered.

Six months later. Now everything is going to the dogs with the unfortunates. I found 'Phonsine high up in a cheap apartment house, in a dirty quarter, living in two small, close rooms,—she who had always known the open fields and pure air. Two of the children were down with measles.

She told me a sad story of how her husband drank, had given her no money for weeks. She did not know what to do, and thought of going back to Valombre. She regretted having come to Paris, charging it with her child's life. Poor 'Phonsine !





HARVEST, 1894

THE weather was lowering and foreboding. I felt heavy and dull, in harmony with the day, as I started off to work, and instead of climbing the abrupt bluff among the great



chestnut roots as usual, slowly sauntered on beyond to the new road, Jean Paul's work of last winter. It gave Jean Paul a winter's work, but spoiled the pretty little wood through which it passed. He did his work well, and to-day I appreciated the easy slope.

How different the plain seemed from what it was last year! Then it was all yellow and gold, giving the impression of teeming with life and wealth; its golden beauty a literal representation of its value. But to-day, under the dull wet sky, treacherous and dark, all was calm and gray,—calm,



even dead, as compared with last August. The stacks formed dark gray-brown spots heavy and dull. There were no signs anywhere of gayety or life. The few harvesters at work seemed less important

than usual, simply a few darker spots in the general dark mass; and the impression I received was that everything was fixed and motionless, sad in its quietness. The contrast was astonishing with last year's harvest, where the sun, playing hide-and-seek with its lights and shadows among the brilliant yellow grain, gave to the air a movement of intense life. Everything vibrated with color; and the peas-

ants working among the stacks, their light shirts and shining blades making brighter spots against the bright wheat, gave an immense, never-ceasing lively movement to the whole plain. Even the clouds caught the spirit, and flitted gayly along above the earth, with the sun's glow playing gleefully among their tips, — now lighting up one mass into a dazzling, cottony heap of something intangible and ever changing; then casting the shadows of one cloud across another, each chasing brightly along after the other, while even the blue ether beyond appeared as if in motion, and seemed to come and go between the lively clouds.

On the earth beneath the shadows danced nimbly along before the harvesters, flitting back and forth, — now on the stubble-broken grounds, purple and blue; then across the yellow fields before the scythe, lighter and apparently almost blue in contrast with the yellow glow of gold which hedged them in.

The air seemed filled with birds chirping and busy; the lark adding his clear note from far up, up among the blue, where the eye with difficulty followed him.

The wheat was ripe and dry, and great wagons came empty and went away loaded with their rich burden. The immense stacks gradually reared themselves about the plain. Busy, tiny figures capped their summits, stowing away the grain for the coming winter. All was life and joy.



Yes, indeed, the difference between then and now is great, not alone as the difference between sunshine and shadow, but almost as the difference between life and death, between joy and sorrow. Then the work had something buoyant and inspiring about it; now the hard labor is apparent.

All is dull and quiet; the clouds are motionless; they seem as of lead, moored for-

ever by their weight, almost touching the earth, as though about to crush it beneath their cheerless mass.

The light tries to break through in the west for a moment; the horizon gives promise of life. A pale silvery band reaches out as though to crowd away the dark clouds and find a footing; but soon an ominous feeling comes over the air, a chilly breath as of the dead, and the bright west has suddenly grown dark and inky, the silver belt is hopelessly buried beneath the storm. The distant hills but a moment before blue are now lost in a hazy, heavy mist; their forms seem washed away, and earth and sky are run together; the clouds have at last fallen, and the rain has dropped its veil upon them.

I watch it coming, advancing irresistibly and relentlessly; now it has covered Pontoise; the town is lost from the world. Steadily it comes, rushing and swishing, with gusts of wet wind as forerunners, bringing a chill of despair and discouragement.

Now the storm has reached the village;

the trees bordering the plain are soon lost in the white mist. I see it coming towards me with the speed of a race-horse, and must stand and face it, too late for escape. And now it is here ; rushing and beating, it lashes the ground like a host of seething serpents, pounding and splashing, dashing the light earth about. Scattered straw is blown in every direction, wheat-stacks are torn apart and overthrown ; and the rain beats down and soaks the ripened grain, bringing destruction and ruin with it. Cruel, blind nature, like some mighty wild beast bent on tearing and destroying, merciless in its fury !

The wind steadily rises, whipping the rain across the fields. Starting with an angle of forty-five degrees, it now sweeps horizontally above the ground, beating into my face, wetting through clothes as though cloth was but tissue paper.

The plain has lost all form. It has no beginning, no end. All is a dirty, gray mist, hissing viciously to the right, to the left ; above, and around, rain, rain, and nothing but rain. Yes, its accompaniment, the wind ;

they are playing furious, tragic larks together, ruining and overthrowing many months' hard labor.

As the storm broke, I saw a couple of reapers running for shelter. For ten minutes



or more I lost them, nothing but rain being visible. A lull of a moment allowed me to see them again, crouched beneath a small stack, their coats thrown over their heads. Again the veil dropped, and I lost them; and the rain beat down in torrents, till around me incipient brooks zigzagged among the stubble, gradually gaining in strength and

rushing off down the slope of the plain to the village below.

Slowly, and after innumerable fitful attempts to keep on, the storm spent itself, and through the mist the dark stacks loomed up, now heavy and soaked. And the plain, which before appeared but sad, now looked as though death and destruction had wooed it to keep it in bondage till the last day.

MÈRE POSTOL

GOING this evening after potatoes to Postol's, I knocked on the door; no answer. I went into the hall. Looking through the glass of the kitchen door, I saw the old woman at work, erect, by the table. I knocked again; she remained unmoved. Stupid, stolid, suspicious old peasant, so cautious that she wouldn't commit herself by a word until I should have spoken, not even willing to compromise by saying, "Who's there?" or "Come in," — the typical, cautious, old-time peasant.

A funny-looking little old woman she was, with her bird-like head, sharp nose, lip fallen in where the teeth had been, chin pointed and projecting, with a round, ball-like forehead towering above a pair of little shiny eyes, alert and shrewd, — a woman of perhaps eighty years of age.

She went down into the dark cellar, and got me the potatoes. I asked her if she had any milk. "Yes, plenty; but it's five sous a quart," she added hastily. "For me or for everybody?" I asked. "Oh, for everybody; five sous, or I'll set the cow calving." This startling menace amused me immensely. I had never heard any of that style before, though accustomed to the peculiarities of peasants.

Tricky old hag! she had no intention of "setting the cow calving." With typical inconsistency, she hastened to recommend her milk, saying, "Ah! it's not like that you get from the milkwoman."

Later in the day I went back to her to get some of this milk. I found her, with her daughter, husband, and a neighbor, all sitting in the barn, enjoying the heat given out by three cows. Here they spend the cold evenings. They had prospered, and built a pretentious new house; but the old instinct remained too strong, and here they were enjoying the warm, heavy air of the cattle, partly from force of habit and partly from

the ruling principle of economy, — economy of fuel.

Here the neighbor, an old woman, endeavoring to tell me how much Paris had grown since she was young, said, “It has grown three-quarters bigger;” and, this not seeming enough, added, “and the other quarter.” It could not have been better said even in Ireland.



THE INVASION

AN army corps has just passed through the village, on its way to the *grandes manœuvres*, creating quite a stir of bustle and excitement. Many of the soldiers were lodged for the night with the villagers. Sentinels were placed out on the plain, guarding the sleeping camp playing at war.

All this sets the old people talking of the last war,—real war. Constance describes

the invasion to me in a rambling, disjointed way, though vivid in details, — stolidly, as seen by a peasant ; for the question of patriotism interests him little. His ideas are limited to his soil, and the profits it brings him. His egotism being colossal, the rest of the world



may be going to pieces ; as long as it does not personally affect him, he takes no interest whatever in its fate.

“ Yes, indeed, I remember the Prussians. A famous fear they caused us. We thought we were all going to be killed ; for war, you see, is a terrible thing. Men become wicked. We knew that they were around Paris, but

none had passed our way. Yet the war had upset things. I was anxious to deliver the cloth Gabriel and I had woven, and so started one day, with my donkey, for Trepillon.

“As I got on the hill above Rémy, I saw the soldiers everywhere. There were so many around Paris, they could not take care of them all; so they sent them down on us. I was afraid they would take my cloth; so I started back,—for you know soldiers steal everything, and they were the victors” (giving the impression that she considered the right of the victor as legitimate), — “when ‘Pang! pang!’ I heard the guns going. What a noise! They were all firing at once. It was real war. They were fighting across the river. I could see the Prussians on one side; but the *francs-tireurs* (a company of patriotic irregulars) were behind the trees on the other, and shot them down as they came through a field of cabbage.

“Then they blew up the bridge; so the soldiers had to go away around by Parman. They were so mad that they burned the whole town. All the thatch roofs were in a

blaze. All the sharpshooters they caught they shot at once.

“The artillery brought up their cannon on the plain behind the cemetery, and fired all at once towards Nesle. Oh, what a fearful noise! Real war. The *chaumières* blazed everywhere; for, you know, the thatch burns easily. The sky was all lighted up.

“The soldiers were mad because they had had a good many killed; and when they came into Valombre, we were frightened. They took M. Caffin, the mayor, and tied his hands, and led him barefooted off to L’Isle Adam. They thought he was a *franc-tireur*. But after a while they let him go, when they found out that he was all right.

“At Parman they took a woman who refused to give them oats for their horses out in a field, and tied her up, and covered her with brush, and burnt her up. Oh, yes; you don’t believe me, but it is true,—it is in the histories.

“At Valombre they were divided among the houses. I had two at my house, whom I kept for sixty days. No, they were not

wicked, poor devils ! The war was no fault of theirs ; they had to fight. I cooked for them ; and when they saw my bread, they threw theirs away ; they liked mine because it was whiter. I hid away everything, so that they would not steal our things. They amused themselves by getting my donkey drunk, and thought it huge sport ; but this, with his want of exercise, killed him. It was a great loss for us. But I sold the body to an enterprising butcher, or supply agent, who managed to get it through the lines into Paris, where it was resold at a good profit to the starving citizens.

“ The Prussians did not steal the furniture ; but they took any little thing they could lay their hands on. One of them had a fine Cashmere shawl he had stolen somewhere near Paris ; for wherever the house was deserted, they had a right to take what they pleased. He intended to give it to his mother. One day I threw it behind the bed, as though it had fallen there ; but when he came to go away, he upset the house until he found it.

“They broke a good many doors, and ransacked all the empty houses ; for every one who had money enough had gone away to Normandy. But it did them no good, for the Prussians were everywhere. So they had to come back, and found their doors broken and their houses gutted.

“The soldiers would play with my little girl till the trumpets sounded ; then they would go down to the Place to drill, where they had their cannon all set up, ready to kill the people if the *francs-tireurs* should come.

“It was a hard time for us. The men — our men — did not work. No one would cultivate the land when he thought the Prussians would have the benefit. All work stopped, and we had to spend all our savings to live with. They all went, till we had nothing left. Sad times for us ! We have never been able to save anything since. We are too old now, you see. Ah ! one has hard experiences in this life.

“And now my old man is blind. He can’t work ; we have to live on our children’s

bread. Ah! if the Prussians had not come, we would have our money now.

“The Prussians, when they saw my father’s medal, knew he was an old soldier of Napo-



leon, and they did not bother him. They would salute him, because he had been a soldier of the great Napoleon. Napoleon was a great soldier, you know, and had been

in their country more than once,—I don't know how many times; but my father used to tell me. But I haven't a good memory for all those names and battles.

“War is a very bad thing. Lots of the young people want the war to come again. But they have never seen it; they don't know what it is. It is a bad thing.”

CARVOL AND THE FÊTE

ANOTHER Fourteenth of July has come, and the village is celebrating.

I notice, as a side-show of the *fête*, that the men are gradually giving themselves over to the flowing bowl. Here and there I see the women flitting off to their cellars in the side hill to bring wine and cider. Shortly after, patriotic voices and songs well out through the windows of the house where the wine has gone in.

As the afternoon turns into evening, the drinking is hard and heavy, and weary men unsteadily carry their loads from the saloons across to the Place and from the Place back to the saloons.

Just as I sit down to smoke after supper, Carvol comes laboring up the lane. Heavily he flops down by his door, relapsing into a reflective state, and, notwithstanding Rosalie's

spirited berating, makes no remarks. At last an idea comes to him ; he hunts through his pockets, and finds a fifty-centimes piece (ten cents). "I'm going to buy some sky-rockets," he says, and, once having got this absurd idea, nothing can change him ; so off he starts, accompanied by his little dog, who seems to watch over him whenever he is drunk.

Later I saw him in the store making his purchases, — purchases which caused him a lot of reflection. He had too much to choose from, and with difficulty, after bothering the shop-girl for a good half-hour, decided on two rockets. Here I missed him ; but soon saw him coming out of his house with a match in hand to set off his rockets. Just here Rosalie furiously rushed at him, crying, "You drunkard, are you crazy ? Do you want to set the thatch roof on fire ?" And in spite of his strenuous protestations, she knocked him over, and took away his match and rockets ; at the same time giving him a terrible tongue-lashing.

To my surprise, he sat leaning against the

wall as though dumfounded, and made no protest. Thus he sat and reflected for some five minutes or more ; then suddenly the injustice of the case dawned upon him, and he clumsily gathered himself upon his feet, swearing that as he had bought those rockets they should go off. Things looked bad ; but fortunately the family managed to quiet him, promising to set off his rockets later, and his wrath passed off in sullen mumblings.

A little later in the evening Kaiser set off the rockets for him ; and as he was now nearly helpless, they succeeded in dumping him into bed, and Carvol ceased to be a part of the *fête*.

While this family scene was taking place, a busy man had lighted, one by one, the myriad of little lights which decorated the Mairie and the Place. As darkness settled down, the effect became very pretty indeed, the big "R. F." shining out from the wall, while numbers of Chinese lanterns vied with the glass lights ; and the crowd commenced to gather. The band and firemen, who had been parading and playing all the afternoon,

were now hard at work eating and drinking at the hotel, Valombre paying the bills. This is the way in which their services were paid for; a general banquet rewarding them for their hard, patriotic work. The mayor ran things and kept count of expenses, careful not to go beyond the amount set apart for this *fête*.

At the beginning of the repast scarcely a sound was heard from these fifty or sixty men busily eating, each being on his good behavior. But once the meal well over, the hubbub was bewildering, the wine had loosened their tongues, all hands talked at once; some even sang; others shouted in the joy of animal spirits, and all enjoyed themselves.

This dinner settled, they wandered across the street to the ball-ground, the grass-plot before the Mairie. The orchestra struck up a waltz, and in a moment the Place was alive with jumping humanity, and the ball fairly started, and good for all night, till the small hours of the morning.

Very, very picturesque and pretty was the

scene. Bright, happy faces lighted by varicolored lanterns were a pleasure to look on, and I heartily enjoyed the sight. Every one seemed to be so happy and so healthily happy. Faithfully I added my mite of patronage to the dance; and Julie and I labored through the dense crowd of dancers and jumpers. During one collision 'Médé Romaru hailed me, asking whether everything went as I wished nowadays. I cheerfully answered in the affirmative, returning the question. "Ah, no; things didn't go well with him." This was all I got, though he tried to tell me the story as we both whirled round and round, couples flitting between us, and we steadily drifting apart. The experience was amusing, thus to listen to a serious *doléance* while in the heart of a lively dance; but to 'Médé it was all right. Had it been physically possible, he would have given me all the details.

Being but an indifferent dancer, my legs found the work rather hard, the ground being painfully uneven, and grass not being the easiest thing in the world to glide over while

endeavoring to protect your partner from fearful collisions. I withdrew after this dance ; but my place was soon filled, as the whole village was there, trying to dance.

The young and bold dance first ; while the older people wait till later, when the green has lost the most of its exhausted dancers. I often thus notice good old people faithfully waiting till midnight to get a chance to dance again and bring back the souvenir of youth, their opportunities and excuses for dancing being very scarce.

The *fête*, as a whole, is lively and healthy, — an admirable means of letting these hard-working peasants enjoy themselves, if only for once a year.

THE BLACK SHEEP

POOR Rosalie ! Several times to-day I noticed that she appeared to be in great trouble, weeping freely and vigorously. Célestine kindly endeavored to calm her, though I could form no idea of the cause of the trouble, supposing it to be another of the many rows between Rosalie and her drunken husband. I became interested in the subject on seeing Célestine hunt for her key, open the door, and take Rosalie inside to console her.

Later in the day I heard something about Kaiser's being drunk ; but as this is a common occurrence, I came to the conclusion that he must have been getting into trouble of some kind, and took advantage of meeting Célestine to ask what was the matter. The old woman assumed a most tragic expression, and with tears in her voice told me impressively that Kaiser had been sent to prison ;

meaning that he had been arrested. He, with several comrades, while drunk had stolen some fish from the fisherman's boat, and as a result had been taken away to-day by the gendarmes.

While admitting that it was too bad for Rosalie, I did not think the case very grave, and so suggested. "Ah, but that is n't all," said Célestine. He had already been arrested once before, and in some way or another, the explanation being very vague and rambling, had dodged the payment of his fine. Doubtless the mayor was cognizant of this part of the affair, but closed his eyes to it; the peasants holding together in astonishing solidarity when it comes to avoiding the law. Now it was feared that this second offence, added to the first disregard of the law, would go hard with him, and that his chances of being sent to prison were more than good.

Poor Rosalie! how delighted she had been when Kaiser was exempted from military service on account of his thumb! What a *fête* she made of it! She thought that she

had saved a son and cheated the government, that great enemy.

But he, left behind in Valombre while his companions went as soldiers, had wandered sadly around like a bird of an odd species, looking for a double. Forced to chum with boys younger than himself, or men older, he had drifted into the companionship of a lot of vagrants of the latter age, and had easily adapted himself to their habit of drink. The army with its hard discipline might have saved him. Now, instead of serving his country in a dignified way as a soldier, he will serve the state as a convict.

Rosalie threatens to take her life ; Frosine, the fat, good-natured wife of the mayor, tells her to do nothing foolish, and very kindly consoles and encourages her ; but Rosalie's heart is big with grief.

The affair has been hushed up, the fisherman magnanimously refusing to appear ; and, through the connivance of the mayor, the prison-door has opened, and Kaiser is given another chance.



BY THE RIVER

DURING summer Valombre is quite a resort for enthusiastic fishermen. On Sundays family parties come down from Paris, and, with a wonderful lot of gear, install themselves along the shady banks of the Oise, where, by strictly attending to business, sacrificing every rational pleasure of life, they may catch a few modest gudgeon.

Innumerable are the poles dangling over the swift-running stream. But easily numbered are the fish caught. Yet, notwithstanding the great disproportion between outlay and returns, nothing can dampen, let

alone discourage, the enthusiasm of the devoted fishers. Their patience is something phenomenal, and night alone can put a stop to their sport.

Through the week the villagers replace the Parisians; and a constant interest is accorded to adventurous fish. At all times one finds these earnest disciples of Izaak Walton patiently watching their floating lines,—some from boats; though most of them select sheltered spots along the bank, where, half dozing, half waking, they calmly wait till the taking of a misguided fish arouses a sudden enthusiasm, to drop again slowly back to the original, patient calm.

As I worked to-day by the river, below me on the bank sat one of these fishermen. I heard him carrying on a conversation with a crony who had floated down in a boat and now lazily rested on his oars.

Their remarks, as I caught them in a fragmentary way, amused me very much. At first they talked fish, but had apparently exhausted the subject about the time I arrived. A painful lull here followed, broken by the

fisherman's suggesting that he had been shaved to-day. At first glance this remark



gave but slight opening for conversation; but the boatman, grasping at a straw, asked the fisherman if he shaved himself. This gave the latter a chance to tell how and when he

had been shaved. Sometimes he shaved himself; but to-day he had Colignon do it, — Colignon, that local star of many talents!

Here the boatman told about *his* shaving, etc.; then wandered on to tell of his grandfather, who had shaved himself up to the age of eighty-seven. This excited the fisherman; and I heard him wildly endeavor to hold his own; though here I lost the plot, as both struggled together, for the supremacy. I did catch the startling remark that a barber was a “sort of artist,” “like a painter, you know” (painters being now familiar to the natives of Valombre). This comparison rather shocked my pride; but being only a listener, I had to submit in silence.

The shave subject kept conversation going for about fifteen minutes; and then, both exhausted, a silence painfully oppressive fell over the river, broken desperately by the boatman’s, “Well, I must be going;” this being his means of escape from the embarrassing position into which the exhaustion of ideas had thrown him. The fisherman breathed freer, as his situation was more

awkward, being forced to sit in place, and unable gracefully to beat a retreat.

As the boatman rowed away, an old woman came along, driving a cow and three sheep. Having no one else to talk to, she talked to



them. I could hear her afar off, and, not looking up, was surprised to see but one person, when she came by me. She pounced on the fisherman; and they had quite a spirited talk for a short time. But he in his weakened condition was no match for

her, and was only saved by the cow's strolling off in the field, forcing its owner to chase it. The procession moved up my way. She looked encouragingly at me; but I was too busy. So she tried a boy fishing a few rods farther up the stream. He was unsatisfactory; so again she resorted to the unresponsive sheep, berating them for their stupidity. Life saw too dull here; and in a short time the procession turned back and wound out of sight, behind the trees on a bend of the river, where the women were washing.

Now all was again quiet. I worked on. Suddenly I heard quite a disturbance behind me; and on looking around saw the triumphant boy landing a fish of about three inches in length. Though beaming with pride at his success, he half apologized for its diminutive size, by saying, "It is n't big, but it's a fish, just the same;" showing the true fisherman's spirit.

Here the sun came out, driving me away; and I left boy and man silently fishing, or, rather, watching their lines. The silence

only broken by the swash of the river, as a tug steamed by towing a canal-boat; or the crack of the driver's whip on the tow-path across the stream. A pastoral silence in a pastoral setting!



PALMYRE

PALMYRE went up to Paris with me on the train. She was going to see 'Phonsine, not having seen her since Clémence's death, and dreading the explosion of the mother's grief which awaited her.

The idea had taken her suddenly, — “just like that,” she told me. In her basket she carried a good fat rabbit, newly killed. On arriving in Paris she intended buying a white-rose bush for the little girl's grave before going to the house.

Good soul ! she was also taking up a sketch of the child which I had made two years before. This she dreaded, she said. She knew that there would be a scene, but the portrait must be delivered some time ; so it might as well be faced out and over with now as well as later. Agathe, her sister, would n't go, as she feared this climax, and

did n't feel her nerves strong enough to stand it. A few days later, however, she in turn sent up to 'Phonsine a good bag of freshly gathered beans and other vegetables, as her offering of good-will.

Now Palmyre seems worried ; her son is to be married to a girl in Pontoise ; evidently Palmyre is n't satisfied, as she shows but little enthusiasm when speaking of this prospect.

On meeting me, in a burst of enthusiasm, she invited me to the wedding dinner. Apparently she had become reconciled to the idea of the marriage. I tried to excuse myself, fearing that a stranger at table might interfere with the free enjoyment of the others. But she would n't have no ; so, to avoid wounding her, I accepted.

As she came back from the train, where she had gone to receive the married couple, the wedding having taken place the day before at the home of the bride, she called for me, and I joined the procession. The godmother, a little old woman about four

feet and a half high, took my arm, and we marched bravely along the high-road ; while the villagers came to their doors to see the show.

First we went to the hardware store, where the goodwife, a relation to the groom, opened a number of bottles of wine. Palmyre had announced dinner for promptly half-past six ; yet here we sat well beyond the hour, — no one appeared to bother about time. Gradually the party spread itself about the quarter ; each hunting for some guest behind time. Seven o'clock went by, yet no signs of the stragglers. Palmyre impatiently sent out scouts after the party. These soon disappeared, and others were sent after them. Half-past seven ; and still each was wandering about, as though time were no object.

At last, after a determined effort and good luck, she got them all together, or at least the bulk of the company ; and we sat down to table at twenty minutes to eight.

The tables were spread in a neighboring grange, — Frédéric's. This scheme had been

decided on during the hot spell ; but now that the weather had suddenly freshened, the idea was not as happy as it might have been. Though big wagon covers were hung at the open end of the shed to keep out the wind, the temperature was decidedly low ; in fact, here we were, the first of October, virtually dining out of doors at night.

Every one made a brave show of enjoying the existing condition of things, just the same. But gradually, one by one, the hats were hunted up and donned ; and we ate the wedding dinner with covered heads. This unceremonious condition gave a peculiarly informal character to the proceedings. And yet, in spite of our hats, though we drank heartily and ate even more so, the cool air kept the general spirits rather quiet, — down to the thermometer.

Palmyre, to remedy things as much as possible, plied her guests with cognac, endeavoring to raise the temperature artificially.

The meal dragged on, with many a hitch and shuffle. Between the courses the waits were long ; the next dish being not yet quite

cooked, causing delay. But each vied with his neighbor in keeping up a healthy gayety.

It was very amusing to me to watch this happy group of peasants enjoying themselves. *Sans gêne* was the order of the day. At first every one tried to be more or less dignified ; but, as the dinner proceeded, natural instincts and spirits took the lead, and each gave himself up to the impulse of the moment. All sham was thrown overboard. A guest taking a notion to say something to another at a far end of the table, would take his napkin and walk down the file, comfortably carry on his conversation, then scramble back into place as the next course came on. At times half the party were thus standing around the table ; occasionally, in their hurrying back, getting seriously tangled up in each other's chairs. And the noise and mirth kept steadily growing.

Moru, at the head of the table, was in his glory ; his reputation, as a wit, already established, — a reputation of long standing. Whenever he opened his lips to crack a joke,

the rest beamed in anticipation, and at the climax paid their tribute to genius by boisterous explosions of laughter.

The butcher opposite me made a determined endeavor to be funny; at times, success failing to come to him, he would collapse, and look seriously sad; but his spirits, if not his wit, were really good, and he soon recovered, to make another effort, and by dint of perseverance won his audience and triumphed through the rest of the dinner.

During a discussion wherein one claimed the other was growing fat, I heard number two dispute the charge, giving as proof the fact that his coat, the eternal Sunday one, which he had had made twenty-five years ago, still fitted him. I had always felt that the wonderful coats and hats I saw at weddings, funerals, etc., must have belonged to some remote epoch; and here was the verification of my suspicions.

Towards eleven o'clock the musical spirit seized the merrymakers; and songs were sung, and spoken; for the peasant the words

take precedence over the music. The young girls, of course, had to be coaxed. One old woman, on the contrary, could not be stopped; she had a reputation as a singer to keep up, and volunteered a song at every lull. She started by facing the bride and groom, and sang them their duties, one to the other, etc. At one part, when her song said "on this your wedding-day," she hastily interposed, "it was yesterday, but that does n't matter for the song," and went on. Palmyre fairly beamed. "My sister," she shouted to me; "she can keep on this way until morning." She herself, in her great enthusiasm, endeavored to sing. She did n't know any songs, but simply joined the others; in time or not, it did n't matter, — her happiness was great enough to drown all such trifles.

Now the children, one by one, had fallen asleep on the table, and were carried off to bed. Midnight was approaching, and the party becoming boisterous, though still suffering from the effects of the chill air. This was the time for the clumsy, coarse songs, heavily spiced to suit the popular palate. The

air did n't count ; the words carried the day ; and the good-natured souls roared at the flagrant insinuations.

And yet, though the peasant is so coarse in his tastes, they really behaved very well, as a whole, throughout the meal ; quite agreeably surprising me, as I had expected much greater vulgarity. Here and there a child delighted its audience by singing a song of dubious quality, singing without understanding. To the peasant this was the height of wit, and he fairly suffered in his mirth.

Palmyre's niece, helping in serving the dishes, amused me very much. She was a boisterous, vigorous character, and now, in her enthusiasm, would occasionally give her husband a love-tap on the cheek,—a tap which closely resembled a blow, and seemed to make his head swim. And as I looked at him it seemed to me that his eyes had a wild, fearful look, as though continually dreading these stunning exhibitions of affection. With renewed interest I watched her as she came and went, and feared for the poor man as she neared his place.

During the dinner 'Mélie, old Frédéric's wife, cheerfully helped preparing the dishes ; Palmyre having helped her, two days before, in the preparations for the old man's funeral. She refrained from taking a conspicuous part in the feast, out of respect for her departed ; but she enjoyed her share in the kitchen with the helpers, and though not of the *fête* she was in it.

The thrift of these peasants is still astonishing to me, though now so accustomed to it. Here was Palmyre, who works in the fields, when she can get work, during the summer season at forty-five sous per day ; and yet she managed to offer this dinner, and a really good dinner too, — all meat, of course, to make it a feast for the peasant, who usually makes the bulk of his meal on bread and vegetables, — to about thirty people. It must have cost her at least a hundred francs. How she managed to do it, I cannot understand. But she did it, and heartily ; and enjoyed the performance.

Towards daybreak the chill night air at last was too much to bear ; and noisily the

party broke up, drifting away into the darkness.

When, on the following day, I complimented Palmyre on the success of her dinner, she answered, “ But was n’t it hard luck that it had to turn cold that particular night, while here we’ve been roasting for six weeks? No luck ! ”

MY STREET: EVENING

ROSALIE, sitting on her doorstep slowly shucking peas, complains of her work. Delphine, from the other end of the alley, comes up, bringing her baby. "You have n't dined yet?" she asks. "No; Jean Paul and Kaiser have gone off to fish. They told me not to hurry, as they'd bring back a mess."

"Ah! and my man went off with them too," interposes the other. "Oh," then cries Rosalie, "there's no use waiting. I'm off to bed. We won't see them in a hurry." "But my man had n't a cent," says Delphine. "That does n't matter. Once they are together, they'll manage to get drink. You need n't wait for him."

A worried look comes into the face of the younger woman. She thinks of how, only last night, her husband came home drunk, and brought trouble and dispute into the house; and now, if he should do it again —

Just at this point a white figure puts in an appearance at the bottom of the street. The women's voices are hushed : " Is he drunk ? " Another good-for-nothing, the father of Delphine. Anxiously they wait as he comes steadily up the path. As he passes, they hardly say, " Bon soir," holding their breath. But, happily, this time he is not drunk, and the worried women draw a freer breath as he sits down to play with the baby.

After a few moments he goes off, and then another procession shows up, coming from the river. It is the fishermen ; and, behold ! they are not drunk, and have even brought back fish, and good big ones too. Jean Paul proudly throws them into Rosalie's lap with an exulting " How 's that ? " And joy reigns in the court ; the black shadow of fear is lifted.

Delphine flies off to cook her husband's dinner, while Kaiser sets to work to scrape the bright shining fish, littering the ground with the silvery scales. And the evening bids fair to pass quietly and happily, at least for the women.



“LE SOURD”

HE was so terribly deaf that for years he was known only as *le sourd* (the deaf man). His case was sad: he had outlived his time and friends. Some twenty years back his wife died; then his decline commenced. His trade, that of weaver, had already become obsolete. The old man patiently endeavored to work on in the old groove; but facts were too strong and real, and his faithful loom had to give up the competition with steam machinery.

He now had ceased to belong to his day, and found that the world needed him no more. Disconsolately he tried to adapt

himself to the prevailing conditions, but the attempt was hopelessly condemned at the beginning. He was too old to learn a new trade. Nothing was left him but to hold out on what little he had amassed. But alone he managed poorly; and gradually the house, the furniture, and himself fell into a sadly dilapidated condition. They all went to pieces together. In the windows, panes were broken and lost, their places patched in a nondescript manner. With him, panes had also fallen out. His sight became dimmed; the old, battered doors hung feebly on their worn-out hinges, working no easier than did his rusty joints. Man and house were slowly decaying together, the one being a reflection of the other's state.

He lost his hearing; and his last pleasure, that right of old age, gossiping, was seriously endangered, as the difficulties of making him hear were so great that none but the most generous or most determined gossips would try to talk to him. And thus, to add to his other misfortunes, he found himself left more and more alone.

Through all these lonely years the old man remained good-natured and lively in his wit, so that every one liked him. But no one in the busy village had time to pay much attention to him, and his loneliness must have weighed heavy. Often I have seen him



wandering about as though in search of some one to talk to. He would climb to the plain and sit idly in the sun, watching the busy harvesters. After they had left, he would still linger, waiting, waiting for what he knew not. And life hung heavy on his hands.

His wrinkled face, with its deep scars of

the battles of life, interested me, and I asked him to pose. The difficulty I underwent in making clear to him this idea was tremendous. Had I anticipated it, my courage would have faltered before approaching him. Added to the trouble of making him hear, was the even greater difficulty of getting into his head what I meant; his ideas on posing being, naturally, deplorably vague. I shouted into his ear—the good one—at the top of my lungs, till the air rang with the echo. A light of intelligence suddenly beamed in his face. “You want me to do some gardening for you?” I again took breath and came to the attack, and at last he got it. After the first pose, he took kindly to the work, and eventually became a sort of nightmare to me, as I found him at all hours outside my gate, lying in wait for me.

As winter came on, the old man grew sadder, and looked terribly unhappy. His creaky house let in the wind too freely, and he shivered, alone, from autumn to spring.

The last winter was a severe one for him. His fuel gave out, though he nursed it care-

fully. He grew cold and colder. His physical suffering became so great that his moral ideas were shattered, and he thought of laying sacrilegious hands on his dear loom, to use as firewood. For weeks he fought away the idea, as being too terrible; but, like a fearful obsession, it would come back and almost overpower him. Sadly he went down cellar, and looked at it; but his heart grew weak. He loved it too much. He could not destroy what had been his companion, his mission in life, through so many years.

He walked out of doors to fly the temptation; but every cold night brought it back, till, gradually, the poor, suffering, shivering animal dominated, and cried out for preservation. Wildly he took his axe, and with tears dripping and freezing on his haggard cheeks consummated his crime.

As the warm flames again thawed his heart back to life, remorse overpowered him; but, alas! too late. Poor old Gus! His grief at thus severing the last tie with his own world, his old life, must have been great. From this time a sadness came over him, and he walked

about as one bearing the burden of some great crime done and never to be forgotten.

Things went from bad to worse; and, to live, he must sell the old house. This, after protracted procrastination, he nerved himself to do, on condition that he should be allowed still to finish in it his remaining days.

The new owner at once set to work repairing it. The old, leaky thatch-roof was torn off, and replaced by one of brilliant red tiles. While the workmen were at it, the old man wandered around the house, in a hopeless, lost way. He no longer recognized his dear old place. It was sad to see him come down and silently watch the work of destruction and renovation for a while; then clamber up to his room, where he could be heard talking away to himself; again to come down and prowls about. Steadily, though fitfully, he kept this up during the whole of the work. It was evident that the change was a great shock to him. He lost his appetite, and spent his dinner-hour in helpless fascination before the great change taking place in the home he had grown old in.

From this time he lost courage, and steadily failed, taking to his bed. Having missed him for some time, I went over to see what had become of him. Climbing the decrepit stairs, I knocked on his door. Receiving no answer, I pushed it open. Everything was in disorder, and the air felt like that of death.

The old man lay stretched out on his tumble-down bed, a couple of big sticks holding it in place. I thought him dead, and silently advanced and bent over him for some sign of either life or death. For some moments he remained rigidly motionless; but just as I had come to the conclusion that all was over, my presence aroused him. He started up wildly, crying, "Who is it? what is it?" In his weak state he feared that I was Death in person, or, perhaps, the devil, as some of the old peasants have an idea that the devil comes personally to claim his own. When at last he recognized me, he was greatly relieved. I asked him what was the matter, or, rather, howled it at him; but without success.

Being anxious to know whether any one

was looking after him or not, I went off to a neighbor, and howled my question to her, forgetting for the moment that every one was n't deaf. She told me that his sister had been to see him, but had gone off, saying that she was tired of nursing him, as he would “neither get well nor die.”

This to me seemed too terrible, that the old man should thus be left to die alone. I went to the mayor and asked what could be done. He seemed to think that the old man must die, so that it was not worth while doing anything. I admitted that he would probably die, but vigorously protested against his being left alone to do so, claiming that it would be a disgrace to the village to allow him to perish in this way. This view of the case, and my persistence had an effect on the mayor's indifference, and he said that he would send him to the hospital at Pontoise, in case the doctor would give a certificate stating that the old man's trouble was something beside old age. The village would then pay fifty cents per day for his care. This satisfied me, and, seeing the doctor, I requested him to over-

look the old-age trouble, and make out the certificate.

In due time this was done, and the old man shipped off to the hospital. I felt that the change would perhaps kill him, thus to have to leave his old house; but it seemed the only thing to be done. And, alas! as I feared, the hospital was too much for him. They washed him, and put him in a clean bed. The effect was death to him, for in a few days he passed away. Poor old Gus! for years he had never known what a bath was. His first experience killed him.





FIRE AT RÉMY

It seems that at last our fire-brigade has had an opportunity to use its pump, the celebrated “*aspirante et refoulante*.” Justice has at last been done; their long waiting of years has finally been rewarded.

A fire at Rémy, across the river, was the excuse. About midnight I had heard a drum being brutally pounded; shortly after a clumsily blown trumpet disturbed my slumbers. I cursed the latter as a nuisance, thinking that some reveller returning drunk from the *fête*

of L'Isle Adam, feeling the necessity of company, was thus searching for it. I even became so indignant that I thought of getting up and stopping him ; but being too drowsy rolled over and endeavored to take up the broken thread of my dream.

In the morning I was informed of the fire. Its effects on Valombre were very amusing. The men who had turned out in the night were too tired to go to work to-day, and patronized the saloons to talk "fire" over sundry glasses. Those who had not taken part in the affair so regretted it that now they joined in here, thinking "better late than never." And though they could not add their testimony, they at least would drink and show a proper sympathy ; even tell how the fire should have been dealt with, etc.

Of this category were my neighbors, Carvol, and Delphine's husband ; and early in the day they were already up to the proper pitch of enthusiasm, and in a condition which would have been bettered by having the pump-hose turned on them.

On arriving at my place for working this

afternoon, just on the edge of the plain, in the shade of some small poplars, I there found Carvol sleeping the sleep of the very drunk, his little dog Misère keeping guard over him. Several hours later, as I was finishing my picture, he rolled over and woke up; but it was very evident that life was a burden to him, his head was too heavy. He told me of the fire so graphically that I naturally thought he had participated in the excitement. But Rosalie informed me later, with a sincere sentiment of disgust in her voice, that he had lazily remained in bed, and now had got drunk out of sympathy with the others.

My little model, Andrea, told me, in the most matter-of-fact way, that Carvol, her uncle, had got drunk "with papa and grandpa;" and the poor child was so accustomed to such occurrences that she spoke of it in the most innocent manner, as something not at all startling, making no comments.

Later, on going to the butcher's, I had to wait long and impatiently while the butcher's wife gave her ideas on the fire to a customer.

Escaping from her, as of course I in my turn had to hear the story, I stepped into the green-grocer's across the street. Madame Sergent was going it in full blast, both arms extended, feverishly describing the immense flame, the pump, "*aspirante et refoulante*," etc. I remark that this high-sounding title descriptive of the pump's qualities comes faithfully into every account. Evidently the natives like these two new big words, and are proud of their pump which supports so heavy a title.

And wherever I go the fire is the great topic; and the erstwhile quiet air of Valombre is alive with tales of flame and pump, "*aspirante et refoulante*."

PÈRE GAUDRIER

OLD PÈRE GUADRIER occasionally acted in the capacity of substitute whenever, for any reason, the postman was unable to attend to his duties ; and then the jumble was terrible, especially with letters bearing foreign names such as my own. He distributed them right and left, but rarely in the right places. And often a letter would be brought me by some one living at the farther end of the village, delivered there, as usual, by mistake.

Once I met the old man away up at Butry. I asked him if he had n't a letter for me ; he looked, to oblige me, and found one. Where it might have been delivered had I not by chance met him, would be hard to say. He was not a bit put out, but, on the contrary, seemed to feel quite proud that he had recognized me, though so far from home. He afterward innocently told me that some

people were fussy enough to complain of him because he occasionally misplaced a letter. I sympathized with him, and naturally admitted the injustice of such severity; as a result, we became great friends.

Having missed him for some time, and wondering how he had got through the winter, I dropped in on the old man late one afternoon. His wife was in the kitchen when I entered; she beamed me a welcome, and, in response to my questions regarding her health, told me all about her sickness.

I had already supposed her dead and buried, as on my last visit the old man told me, with tears running down his cheeks, that she had been bedridden for some months. "It seems," so he told me, "that the marrow of her backbone has settled down into her legs, so that she can't lift them." Poor old man! his ideas were rather vague on disease and anatomy.

"Ah," she said, "one must have a solid frame to resist at my age, — seventy-three. They told me that it was paralysis; but I said to myself, as for being paralyzed, I'm

not, for you see when one is paralyzed he does n't feel anything, it's as though one were dead; but I, on the contrary, felt all my trouble. Oh, I knew well what it was from the beginning; it was the marrow of my backbone. I could feel it detaching itself from the spine of the back, like that," making a graphic gesture. "At last I began to find the time long. I asked how long I had been here? They told me two months. Then I wanted to get up. My husband made me a pair of crutches; but I could n't budge, my feet were too heavy. But one day I managed to get downstairs. They were n't long; still, I had to come down on my four paws like a baby, and to go up in the same way. The doctor was astounded at seeing me up. Now it's going a little better. I take my stick for walking, because I don't want to fall, you know." Suiting the action to the word, she cheerfully dragged her old bent body out into the sunlight.

The old man complained of having a heavy cold which had settled in his throat, and gave me a detailed account of his per-

sonal ailments; striking a side blow at the doctor, like a true peasant, saying that *he* did n't count for anything in his wife's recovery. From this he wandered on to tell me about the old clock, which, hanging at a drunken angle, ticked away cheerfully though feebly. "Yes," he said, "that's the only way it will go; the railroad, you see, shakes it up so. For three months I gave up trying to make it go; then, one day, I said to myself, 'Let's have another look at it,' and I pushed it around that way, 'perhaps it will go like that;' and, *voilà*, it started and has gone ever since. But it stops if I straighten it up. Funny, is n't it? but it's like that, *voilà*!"

He informed me that his trade was that of a saddle-maker, but that he did very little now, as he could n't see clearly. So he mended umbrellas and odds and ends in general, suggesting that if I wanted anything mended he could mend it.

For a long time I saw no more of the old man, and one day, to my surprise, was informed that the old couple had left,—had

removed to Paris. I afterward discovered that some charitable friends had had them comfortably placed in an old people's home. It was probably hard for them to end their days in this way, for they had both remained quite independent to the last. But unfortunately they had lived too long to be able to earn their living; after sixty years of work they could do no more.

Last Sunday *Père* Gaudrier's furniture and odds and ends were sold by auction, bringing about one hundred francs; eighty of which were to go to the landlord for payment of back rent, the rest for the old man. It would have broken his heart to see his dear old relics sold for a song; fortunately he was not there. The old man, like all old people, had valued his belongings, familiar to him for years, at a high price, and his disillusion must have been painful when he found but twenty francs coming as his share.

Dosh, my model, bought his overcoat for twenty-five francs (five dollars). Other things sold for but two or three sous, etc. But

he had so much rubbish that the whole mounted up to a reasonably fair sum, considering the value of the stuff. And now the last trace of the poor old man has left Valombre.

The following year I heard that he was dead. He had pined away, unable to accept life away from the open fields, and unhappy under the restraint of the hospital discipline. The old woman, at last reports, was still living, though it was generally thought that she would soon follow him.

Poor old people! after fifty years of independent housekeeping, they could not adapt themselves to a new life thus at the eleventh hour.





IN THE FIELDS

THE life of the fields is always picturesque and interesting, especially during the pea and bean seasons. Gay, happy crowds busily gather the green pods, which in the evening are shipped to Paris for the morrow's market. Young and old work side by side. The crop must be quickly gathered, while the market is still empty. So all must lend a hand, and the great plain is full of life.

They take their work cheerfully, keeping up a running fire of jokes, — jokes often

decidedly broad, — yet their wit is not always stupid, by any means. Though coarse and boisterous, their good humor is invigorating, and sustains them through the long day of burning sun and bent backs.

Now and then a song is started, — some old romance, which their grandmothers had sung



at the same work ; one of those old trailing melodies, without end, and always with a chorus, in which all would join. Though the voices are uncultivated and sometimes false, they do not lack sweetness and harmony. Brusquely succeeding an air of “Old France,” comes a modern song, of

decidedly Parisian flavor. Even the peasant tries to keep up with the times.

Gossiping and singing, the busy hands rapidly filling their baskets, lighten their labors. The topics of the day, the events of the village, marriages, deaths, etc., are



discussed. Those who saw the tricks of the prestidigitateur on the "Place" the night before, glowingly recount the performance to the less fortunate; and conversation dwells on magic: each has seen some particular trick more wonderful than that known to his neighbor, etc., etc.

As this subject becomes exhausted, one little girl varies the monotony by graphically recounting the suicide of her father. He had already attempted to take his life, and she had watched him suspiciously on his last night, as he pretended to sleep. At last,



thinking him really asleep, she had fallen into a doze. Awakening suddenly with a start, and missing him, dreading the worst, she mounted to the attic, where, hanging to a beam, swung the body of her father. Though terribly frightened, she managed to give the alarm; but too late.

This story cast a sympathetic gloom over

her audience; then commentaries showered in, thick and fast. The tragedy suggested



others, and now the morbid was the order of the day. Each had some lugubrious story to



tell, one woman recounting a whole series of misfortunes, all happening to her or hers.



But this gloom was of short duration : the sun shines too brightly ; life is strong and healthy, and again the jokes fly free and fast.

A stop is taken for lunch, under the shade of a huge cotton umbrella, or beneath one of the great wheat-ricks which



cover the plain. Then the work goes on until dark. The shepherd driving in his

flock is the signal for the close of the day's work, when weary laborers lay down their baskets and again straighten their bent backs.





THE FISHERMAN

I WENT down to the river to-day to see the fisherman. On reaching his place I found that he was away ; but while hesitating as to where to go to look for him, the problem solved itself by his boat's suddenly rounding a bunch of willows, returning from a catch. With his wife, he had been up the river fishing ; but the day had proved unsatisfactory, — the water was too cold, he told me.

The old woman was not talkative, and

silently studied me, drawing within her shell at sight of the stranger.

On my asking if it was here that Kaiser had stolen the fish, she at once came to life, and developed a wonderful volubility. Blood will tell; she was Constance's sister, and, once warmed up, there was no stopping her. She soon gave me all the information I desired, and more, more, — quantities of it. For nearly an hour she held me, and was fresh and alert when I, exhausted, pleaded an errand and escaped. Talking in great quantities is a gift in Constance's family.

“Yes,” she started, “right here, right in that boat you see; there's where those good-for-nothings robbed me. They came in the night, after we had gone to bed, and with some sort of a pry burst the padlock. They took thirty francs worth of fish, then threw the lock, chain, and boxes overboard, — the scoundrels! as though it was n't bad enough to steal, they destroyed the property. That was useless wickedness, — ah, the scamps! He, over there [the proprietor of the *bateau lavoir*], heard them at it, and

came over to tell us. On his way he met them, the three, with the basket, crossing the bridge going to Rémy.

“I got up at once, and waked my old man. They had gone to the liquor shop at the end of the bridge, — a good-for-nothing and a thief, that *marchand de vins* ! While Firman went off after the gendarmes, I prowled around and listened by the window. They were talking and joking about the theft inside. One said, ‘If the old man had come down, I’d have clubbed him quiet.’ Another added, ‘I’d have thrown him into the river.’ A third broke out with, ‘But did n’t that eel squirm ? I tell you an eel is awkward to hold ;’ then, ‘That was a fine pike,’ etc., etc. Now,” added the old woman, “I said to myself, ‘My fine birds, now I’ve got you.’”

The gendarmes suddenly startled the jolly thieves by making an irruption into the room. The consternation was general. Flight was impossible. They were called on to own up and give back the fish that were still uncooked. They foolishly tried to lie, saying that there was only one fish. One of the gendarmes

looked at the plates littered with bones and fins and jocularly cried, "Say, Firman, you're a fisherman. Did you ever see a fish with one head and two tails before?" pointing to these remains. This cornered them, and sheepishly they were forced to admit their theft. Search revealed a well-loaded basket of pike and trout, which the saloon-keeper had hid out of sight at the first alarm. "There were two fine big pike," broke in angrily the old woman. "Here is only one; where is the other?" He had escaped, they claimed. The gendarmes ended the scene by putting the thieves in handcuffs, and leading them off to jail.

Firman told me that he had been robbed quite frequently this season. The night of the 14th of July, in his wrath, he took his shot-gun, and patiently waited behind some willows till early morning; but no thieves came. The next night, tired, he slept the sleep of the just, and in the morning found that his fish had again disappeared. His language was fearfully decorative as he stood and looked at the broken lock and boxes.

Constance tells me that once he "laid" for a thief whom he had warned that he would shoot if he ever caught him in the act. The miscreant unfortunately put in an appearance one night when the old man happened to be on the watch, and, while busily engaged in robbing the boat, received a charge of shot in the back. Shortly after he took to his bed. His wife could not understand his strange sickness, the mass of small holes in his back quite confounding her. In a week's time he died.

Nothing was ever said of the affair, the peasant defensively fighting shy of the law. Firman felt very remorseful about the case, though feeling still that he was justified in doing as he had done.



THE CHAIR "RESEATER"

THE rain having stopped my work, I step into the cottage of the old woman "who mends chair bottoms." Oh, no! she did n't mind. I could make a sketch if I wanted to. She had often posed before, etc., etc.; knew all about it.

Yes, business was good enough. There were always chairs to be mended. No; she had no rivals. Her sister used to work at the same trade, but she was dead. True, there was another old woman, up by the Rue Rémy, who used to do this work, but now she had given it up, — was too old.

Last year a man had started to work in the “Place,” the public square. He was a serious rival; “for you know he did nothing but that. He did n’t have a house to attend to.” But at last he went away; so now the field was hers.

She could make from fifty to sixty cents a day, she said, and seemed quite satisfied.

WINTER

WINTER exposes painfully the seamy side of rural life. The thin spots and holes of its garment become conspicuously apparent. The picturesque, unkempt thatch now opens to let in the wind and rain. And they, with unerring instinct, seem to strike at once for the weak spots; and so successful are they in their cruel revelry that the recollection of the warm and dry is almost forgotten. And the present appears all gloomy and cheerless, as though no gayety and joy had ever existed.

The peasant, recently so ruddy and vigorous, a favored mortal in a favored setting, now seems to have shrivelled up into a cringing, suffering beast of burden, forced to expose himself in a seemingly hopeless, cheerless struggle for mere existence.

But a month ago his lot seemed enviable, healthy, strong, and free from undue care. And seeing him thus, all life appeared a great

success. Alas, how quickly the shadows follow the light ! And though ever the same old story, during the bright moments the past and future are quite forgotten or ignored. One willingly lives in the present, and sees no reason why it should not always be thus.

The contrast of the seasons is really appalling. One loses courage at the sight of such a complete collapse from sun, health, and joy, where all prospers, and cares are relegated easily to the background, as though their existence was quite unnecessary, to this terribly apparent evidence of pain, worry, and poverty. The struggle for life becomes abominably evident.

Where but a few short weeks ago the young and old went cheerfully humming to their work in the fields, now, the number sadly decreased, they scurry hastily along, with hands in pockets, and arms hugged close to their sides, in an endeavor to retain their own animal heat as long as possible.

The old, who had gathered a new surcease of life from the summer's sun, now slowly but surely dry up and wither away. The



church bell tolls oftener. But a few weeks back one easily forgot its existence. Now its solemn, lugubrious notes seem ever wailing in the air. The dark, simple funeral procession files oftener and more steadily towards the little cemetery on the hill, where weary bones are laid at rest.

The sun has gone. Reckless of consequences, he brought bright days and joy, drouth and sunstroke, fever and death; then sailed slowly away, leaving the earth to freeze and groan. Heartless and omnipotent, giving and taking life in the same, mighty, blind, indifferent way.

The cold, penetrating wind cuts one to the bone. Night and a pitiless sleet come down together. The bare branches of the tall trees sigh sadly. The sky is cold and leaden; and as the day drops suddenly into night, the thin, leafless branches disappear in the general gloom. From out the dark forest come shapeless, mystic forms, moving slowly and painfully along, like a procession of hopeless but persevering forest Danaides. Now, as they come nearer, they are more clearly

defined against the snow-covered road. Still, they do not seem to be human, though each incongruous shape shows a pair of moving feet. Nearer and nearer they approach. Yes, they are human forms. There is the bright head kerchief, making a light spot against an uncouth mass of something black and jagged towering above it. What is this mystery? Ogres or phantoms? Neither. Only the old women coming from the wood, bearing on their backs their huge, disproportionate loads of fagots.

As they advance, the weird gives place to the picturesque, and this picturesque to the pathetic, as one sees these wrinkled old faces and bent bodies straining under their great loads. Their struggle for existence is a hard one; yet they hold to it and fight bravely, as though there were something to lose. The great mystery of life, unexplainable, but real: those who apparently have everything to gain by death hold on tenaciously to life, and breathe their last breath under protest.

Ah, no! winter is not encouraging. Suffering and misery are its companions. Its

traces are visible everywhere. Even the landscape loses its beauty. The picturesque houses now seem to be but hovels, imperfectly sheltering their unfortunate tenants. Oh, the horrible thing, winter, with its pains and discouragement ! All life looks black and hopeless, and is, for the time being ; and gloom settles over the land.

Then come back, summer, and bring a little more joy into the hearts of the poor and unfortunate !



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